" Why must we fight for the right to live, over and over, each time the sun rises?"

-- Leon Uris, Exodus

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Two sides of NRC

WHEN the era of globalization arrived in the early Nineties an enticing hope was that borders would eventually be dismantled and the world would become a global village. Such hopes were short-lived. Practical difficulties began to surface. Even in trade and commerce, the first few steps taken in this direction by nations like the US failed to sustain and some are being reversed of late. In this context, India is well-advised to firm up its stand on illegal migration, mainly from Bangladesh, in recent decades. However, this clearly poses a huge humanitarian crisis. Governments cannot ignore the perils that their actions would bring upon hapless humans. It is then advisable that a balancing is struck between national interests and humanitarian concerns. So too with Assam and its National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Illegal migrations have been the bane of Assam and the issue had figured prominently in the epoch-making agitation by the All Assam Students Union (AASU), leading to the signing of the Assam Accord by the Centre, the Assam government and the AASU in 1985. While the accord promised that the NRC would be updated, the process carried on for decades.

The intervention of the Supreme Court in 2009 gave a much-needed momentum to the process, and its culmination came in the form of the release of the second and final draft list of the applicants who have been found eligible for citizenship. Nearly 2.89 crore people would benefit from this, but the fact is also that some 40 lakh applicants, ostensibly migrants are left out. They have nothing to prove that the families have settled down in India before the cut-off year of 1971, the time when the Liberation struggle against West Pakistan's dominance started in erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. On the positive side, this is only the draft list, and amendments are allowed.

Notably, Assam is the only state that has a National Registry of Citizens, and this system came into being in 1951. The issue of illegal migrations in the state has both economic and political implications. While indigenous Assamese feel their opportunities for jobs and social well-being are curtailed by the massive migrations, at the core of this desperation is the slow pace of economic growth of the state. If the growth rate had speeded up to appreciable levels, the disquiet among the natives could perhaps have subsided. This goes to show that the North-East region needs special attention from the Centre to accelerate the growth process.

Fish for thought

By K L Tariang

The detection of traces of formalin in fish brought from outside to the state recently leading to subsequent ban of their import, brought back the subject of the need for the state to be self sufficient in fish production. The ban was soon considered as an opportunity for our fish farmers to produce more fish. There was even an assertion that the Meghalaya Aquaculture Mission would be revived Looking back however , there had been no lack of opportunity for our fish farmers to boost fish production as the Fisheries Department had been promoting fish farming in these areas since the time of the erstwhile Assam Government and thereafter continuously by the Meghalaya Government That we have not been able to improve our fish production till recently led to the introduction of the Meghalaya Aquaculture Mission with the aim of making the state self sufficient in fish production by the year 2018.

The much hyped Aquaculture Mission has unfortunately not delivered enough on its promise till now thus leading to negative reactions and scepticism about its efficiency . It thus call perhaps for the need for an independent evaluation on the ground to determine the reasons for this setback for lessons to be learnt and for changes if any to be adopted if the Mission is to be revived Simultaneously, an on the ground inventory may also be necessary to ascertain the actual number and locations of the fish ponds which were created by the Mission, by different Government Departments and independently by individuals down the years as this will provide a realistic base for setting fresh targets and to prevent overlapping while It will also determine as to how many of these existing ponds are actually utilized for fish farming. Subsequently if the Mission is again to proceed then it may need to minimize targets in the initial years for proper selection of genuine applicants for fish ponds , for effectively building up their capacities and to guarantee their keen participation and by ensuring proper monitoring during implementation, for systematic provision of follow up programs with hand holding exercises up to the production stage. The target can further be escalated in the succeeding years when signs of visible success generate real interest in others to take up fish farming. Further if the aim is to improve fish production then the facilities provided may not be for the small and marginal farmers only but also for interested progressive individuals or groups with flexible targets.

On the other hand, it would be expected that the cumulative number of fish ponds in Meghalaya by now would be quite high as many were created since the inception of the State and inclusive of those spilled over from the erstwhile Assam government. Therefore it might not be the lack of number of fish ponds which led to the shortage in the production of fishes in the state but it could be the low yield of fishes from these ponds which is the primary reason for the deficit. In any case going by the record , the large number of fish ponds created by the Aquaculture Mission would have been sufficient enough to give the desired production as envisaged provided these ponds yielded well as anticipated.

It is common knowledge however that the yield of fish from ponds in the upland areas of Meghalaya is usually less than from those in the plains with the same inputs. No wonder fishing competition in such ponds is preferred to fish harvesting, as a better means of earning, as anglers will always pay to try their luck even when fishes in the water are not in plenty. It is the thrill that counts though a sizable catch if made would be an added bonus.. Therefore banning fishing competition in these ponds may not be the solution to improve fish production; nor will construction of more ponds be a viable proposition unless ways and means to improve the yield is addressed first where not much of investments would be required .

"Regrettably many of our rivers and streams which were once fertile fishing grounds have been adversely affected by indiscriminate activities in their catchments in the last few decades where the resultant effect led to dwindling of fish in these waters and in certain instances even led to extinction of aquatic lives .Such rivers and streams have otherwise been rich sources of indigenous fishes where trading in local fish has been the source of income to most riverside dwellers."

Regrettably many of our rivers and streams which were once fertile fishing grounds have been adversely affected by indiscriminate activities in their catchments in the last few decades where the resultant effect led to dwindling of fish in these waters and in certain instances even led to extinction of aquatic lives .Such rivers and streams have otherwise been rich sources of indigenous fishes where trading in local fish has been the source of income to most riverside dwellers. Certain spots along these rivers were also once known as angler's paradise for avid anglers even from outside the state though now that paradise tag is lost and may never be regained . These rivers and streams can otherwise bring in additional sources of fish if they are allowed to be naturally revived and if people are taught to protect and preserve them for their own sustainable livelihoods through fish trade..

However there Is a big "IF" in as far as the natural rejuvenation of these rivers and streams is concerned because of the ever looming threat of indiscriminate activities in their catchments where it seems not much initiatives have been taken so far to control these. Or the desire for quick returns from such activities have taken precedence instead. Coal mining in the catchments especially with toxic acid mine drainage leads to the worst form of destruction of aquatic life in the rivers and streams around. Large power projects and water reservoirs like that of the Kopili on the Meghalaya side and of the Leishka power project would be ideal for Reservoir Fishery Development if it were not for the coal mining activities in the catchments. Closer home, there is the alarming decrease of fish in the Umiam reservoir for reasons which are not clearly specified yet. There were reports however that lately fishes have reappeared again in some rivers and streams after the NGT ban on coal mining but this may be a short reprieve for these fishes as there is no guarantee that the ban will remain for long or if surreptitious coal mining activities in the catchments remain unchecked.

Ultimately , it is hard to visualize that with time Meghalaya would eventually be self sufficient in fish production; not at least within the lifetime of many. When we have not been able to improve fish production in our artificial ponds for so long then it does leave doubts as to whether we can ever do it in the near future. Secondly it requires a shrewd balancing act for any government to let coal mining thrive for more revenue collection while simultaneously ensuring that indigenous fish species flourishes in our rivers , streams and reservoirs. Nor can we be sure that we can religiously protect our water catchments from other indiscriminate activities. Therefore with local fishes not readily available, for many now the thought is whether "to eat or not to eat fish," when there is the lingering anxiety regarding the quality of fish brought from outside. And whether to wait patiently until there is plenty of fresh fish harvested from our local waters is another question. Certainly there is a lot of 'FISH FOR THOUGHT.'

Logical foundation needed on the amended Lineage Bill

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The move of the Executive Committee of the KHADC under the leadership of HS Shylla is commendable, the reason being that the Councillors have for the time being ventured into a different kind of politics away from the politics of money that has always dominated the Council affairs and has been a bone of contention for many years. In fact the intention of the CEM to tackle and prevent the attempt for acquiring permanent settlement by illegal migrants is no doubt appreciable. The argument brought by HS Shylla is purely on the threat from influx and the inability of many indigenous families to control their daughters from cross cultural relationships. While there is some truth in the arguments proferred by the CEM, those who are opposing this Bill too have genuine reasons which are socially and culturally valid and true. But whenever there is conflict of opinions in our society, the sad thing is that personal matters are being flared up as another tool and strategy to achieve their own objectives. Such things should not happen in a progressive society and tolerance that we often propagate should first begin at home.

In my opinion the Bill does not make any difference at all for now so why should we fight among ourselves? And let me try to substantiate this lacuna but firstly, the action that HS Shylla has taken is a good example for all the legislators as well as those aspiring to contest elections in the near future that the primary purpose of being an MLA or an MDC is to deal with the process of legislation and not just to become popular and enjoy facilities but to be devoid of intellectual capacity. The major drawback in our legislative process is that most of those who are elected do not have the capacity and brain to analyze and comprehend the holistic aspect of legislation and its implication. Legislative debates and discussions do not necessarily mean to oppose the Bill, but for deliberation and to obtain precise information on the nature of the Bill. Unfortunately, they have become merely numbers or head counts to second any motion that ensures their position. I am shocked to see that such an important legislation has not gone through the process of legislative debate and discussion to solicit and draw from its logical and cultural background which is meaningful and acceptable to one and all. Had there been a contentious debate, the Bill would have not been hastily passed. Perhaps they (MDCs) are not bothered about the outside world for as long as their position is firm. Who knows after a few months someone might engineer a plan to topple HS Shylla citing some flaws in the recent Bill which they are party to as of now.

Till the day that this Bill was passed in KHADC and until it is assented to by the Governor the sole authority for certifying the ST status is vested with the Deputy Commissioner. And for quite some time now the District Administration has laid down strict criteria for applicants to prove their indigenous identity. But for those whose parentages are from cross-cultural marriages, the only option available is to produce an NOC (No objection certificate) from the clan or 'kur'. Here is a serious lacuna for as long as a particular clan or 'kur' is willing to accept and recognize a person or children whose father is not a Khasi, then why should others obstruct the process. We must not forget that this acceptance by the clan is culturally in the interest of the clan or 'kur' to multiply and populate in order to retain their status and ownership in the society and community. The present Bill is also silent about adoption by Khasi couples of non-Khasi children. There are many instances where most of the barren couples prefer to adopt children from the non- Khasi family. In this case what will be their status?

As far as the recent legislation passed by the KHADC is concerned, I am afraid that the primary foundation of tradition and pillars of customary laws are being kept out. There is no doubt that the foundation of this unique community is under tremendous pressure and there is confrontation from every aspect. As a community that once believed on the principle of divine humanity (tip briew tip blei) by and large it has deviated from this truth. The threat to this unique identity are many and the Council has failed to identify them accurately as not being solely from illegal migrants or cross-cultural marriages per se. Therefore, any legislation brought forward to protect and promote the customs and traditions should also cater to all these issues and threats.

In the strictest sense of Khasi custom the sanctity of marriage is of utmost importance and therefore, it is lawful to marry a person from outside the clan than from the same clan. In other words, cross-cultural marriages or intermarriages are more acceptable than incest or sexual affairs within the clan and to some extent within the same sex. But so far no one has ever dared to come forward with meaningful legislation to prevent these kinds of affairs that are not socially acceptable so far, in the entire society or in the clan. Let us not forget that the clan system or the 'kur' is the foundation and pillar where all essential customs and traditions of the community hang. The 'kur' is the pivotal element for the entire race to propagate itself on the face of the earth. If there is anything unique in our society it is the clan system. The logic that our forefathers have established on the clan system or the 'kur' is distinguishable and formidable where the fabrics of kinship was very strong in the past.

To further supplement the Bill, the KHADC should have also enacted few more clauses that will enable arranged marriages among the Khasis especially for those clans or families that are on the verge of extinction due to various factors such as over-age, choice of individuals, etc. At the same time there should be clauses that will bind and restrict Khasi males from the freedom and habit of abandoning their wives and children. As a professional who has been associated with the development of poor and vulnerable families in rural areas for quite some time, the present Bill will adversely impact these poor households from single-parent families by pushing them to impoverishment and stigmatization within their community. But we must remember that our forefathers were not inhuman. They established laws and customs strictly on divine providence and factual necessity. For a law to sustain over a period of time, it should definitely conform to the humanitarian laws of humanity encompassing all aspects of human life and not just human existence.

TO THE EDITOR

Hitler would have been proud!

Editor

Had Hitler been alive today, he would have probably flown down from Germany to come and congratulate our "Wise Saviour of the Jaitbynriew," Madeng and his fellow legislators for introducing and unanimously passing The Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill, 2018. 'Bravo!' he would say, "the purity of a race must be protected at any cost". But how far back do we go to trace the purity of a race? As Albert Thyrniang stated in his article, 'Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill - Thoughtless Proposition (ST July 31, 2018) Khasis with the clan name prefixed with "Khar" are in all likelihood a result of mixed marriages. Are they therefore by the Hitler Bill's logic of purity of the race, not Khasis? Surely it is common understanding that a Bill or any law will not stop two people from uniting in holy matrimony! I am sure the KHADC is aware of this. So what happens to an offspring of such a marriage after, God forbid , or like they say in Khasi, " Phuit ka Sabuit," Hitler's Bill becomes law. Let's say a child is born of a Khasi mother and a non- Khasi father, but they follow the Khasi tradition and takes the mother's clan name and the child is brought up a Khasi, reads and writes Khasi, follows all Khasi customs and traditions like any other "PURE KHASI." He then grows up and marries a Khasi girl. Now according to the Hitler Bill's logic, he is not a Khasi and the Khasi girl, he marries also no longer remains a Khasi and so too their offspring. Then the Khasi girl who marries such an offspring in the future will also no longer be Khasi. Now a 100 years or so later, we will then have a jait BUAM and MARBANIANG etc., who is a KHASI ST, and also a jait BUAM and MARBANIANG and so on KHASI NON- ST." Our beloved MPSC will have to add one more category in its forms to be filled up by candidates- KHASI, GARO, GENERAL, OBC and "KHASI NON - ST". Bravo Madeng! What a master stroke indeed! You will have managed by your eccentricity and chauvinism to divide our society into two classes where none existed before. And as for your claims of such mixed marriages being used for economic exploitation, it is your Institution which has failed miserably over the decades to protect and uplift the tribal interest by setting up traditional schools etc., as mandated by the Constitution. Shame on you! Phuit ka Sabuit!

Yours etc.,
Jason Myrom,
Via email

Religion & Culture

Editor,

Apropos the article, 'A reality check on the caste paradox,' by Sonie Kharduit (ST July 7, 2018), the purpose of this rejoinder is not to criticize but to clarify. The writer needs to know the true meaning of Christianity before leveling charges. Very briefly a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches "To love each other for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, 1 John 4:7. Verse 11 of same chapter says, "Beloved if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Hate or so called hate speech is not the true colour of Christianity for Christianity is not a religion but a relationship with the savior Jesus Christ. It is life in Christ. Jesus says "The words I speak to you are spirit and they are life" John 6:63.

The writer alleged that Christians regard others as pagans who stand condemned. Again Jesus says in John 3:17, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved". There is Heaven, there is Hell. A person will be saved or condemned depending on his life and work.

Again, based on merit the word pagan needs clarification. As per the Oxford dictionary, a pagan is a person who holds his/her religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions. So according to this explanation paganism is a classification of what one believes. It is not a term of contempt. The expression as given by the writer against Christians was one sided and not desirable.

Another point the writer emphasized was that Christians have to give up culture including the Khasi/ Pnar dance. No, we do not have to give up culture. There is no objection for Christians to wear traditional dresses and apparels and to dance. Only we are taught not to practise rituals like animal sacrifice, knia syiar, shat pylleng etc. The reason is because Jesus Himself has become a living sacrifice for us, once and for all and by faith our sins are forgiven (John 1:29, Heb 9:11-14). We are Christians but in our culture, food, dress, family relationships and other indigenous life - styles we are the Hynniewtrep people. But what we follow in faith and for the salvation is the Bible. Again this is the right of a person. It is a choice and even guaranteed by the Constitution of India Article 25(1). If culture is based on religion it is an infringement on the fundamental Right of every citizen which includes right to worship etc. Let us not mix culture and one's faith or for that matter culture and religion. A person has to decide and find the way to salvation of the soul and forgiveness of sins. Culture cannot be tagged with salvation. Christians do not marginalize traditional dresses and dances and we use them in school functions and other festivities. Those who do not embrace Christianity are simply called non-believers. That's all, because there has to be clear distinction.

There is no derogatory or inflammatory expressions as seen in your columns off and on. Regarding admissions in Christian institutions let us view the matter logically and judiciously. Any institution will not come up unless it is based on the vision, hard work, capital investments like land, money, talents and the combined efforts of all those involved in the project. It is only natural and an accepted universal fact that preference will be for those students connected with the organisers/founders. Let us not be parochial. To level that Christians get first preference into these Christian run institutions is baseless. As a matter fact many Christian students are being refused admission in Christian institutions if they do not fulfill other criteria also. I studied in Mawkhar Christian High School (1959-1965). There were many non-Christians students who got admission without any grievances. Those friends are now well- placed in various jobs and assignments and our friendship continues. We recall the good old days with nostalgia.

Let us therefore view the problem administratively and bilaterally, not unilaterally. Due to the increase in student population every institution faces tremendous pressure on coping with the admissions. In such compelling circumstances every institution has to devise its own criteria to streamline the admission process.

In this matter the government should step up efforts to establish more educational institutions to resolve the crises. On the other hand we have to salute the Christian missions for what they have done so far be it educationally, socially and in providing health care.

Yours etc.,
A.S. Mawlong,
Shillong-8

" I think long-lasting, healthy relationships are more important than the idea of marriage. At the root of every successful marriage is a strong partnership. "

-- Carson Daly

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NRC and media overdrive

THERE was so much tension in the air prior to the release of the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) on July 30 in Assam. But the fear of an outbreak of law and order seems misplaced because nothing of the sort happened although those who found their names missing from the list continue to have heartburns but are told they can repeat the process of inclusion by providing the requisite documents.

The NRC excluded 40 lakh people who constitute more than 10%of the state's population, from citizenships. Earlier Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal had said that those excluded not be treated as foreigners but the NRC report has created panic in the state. The issue of immigration has plagued Assam since 1947 and especially immigration from Bangladesh. But the "Bangladesh" movement targeted Bengali speaking citizens fuelling narrow provincialism. The AASU spear-headed the xenophobic agitation which turned to violence. The Assam Accord of 1985 promised to heal the wound. But the documents had been in disarray. More than 50% of Assam's population were left out of the first document of the NRC and legal citizens were up against it to prove their credentials.

The plantation economy of Assam during the British rule led to a huge influx of migrant labour particularly from Chota Nagpur. Migration continued after independence. That created ethnic, cultural and religious disharmony. Then arose the Hindu-Muslim divide among immigrants. A fair number of Muslim immigrants enter Assam illegally. But the authorities winked at it with an eye on the vote bank. But BJP Government has done nothing about it either. The Supreme Court has not helped but aggravated the crisis. No orderly mechanism has been put in place to help those excluded from the NRC list. The Home Minister in Delhi has assured that the 10% lately excluded will be given an opportunity to fight their case.

Meanwhile the national media has given several spins to the case perhaps because they expected adverse reactions and perhaps even violence after the publication of the final NRC draft. The fact that life went on as usual was a bit of a dampener for a breathless media on the lookout for breaking news. Many in Assam detest this unnecessary anxiety created by media spin doctors. This is a good example of people rising above the need to make news over a sensitive issue. The people of Assam must be appreciated for their maturity in dealing with a delicate issue that had in the past caused its share of agony and bloodshed.

Unmasked: The patriarchal truth of Khasi matriliny

By Dalariti Nongpiur

The last few days have been a rude awakening for a lot of Khasi women. Personally, it feels like someone is trying to rip out one of my legs while simultaneously presenting me with a new pair of crutches. I no longer suspect that we are a small and petty people. I now know for sure. We are incapable of evolving - stunted as we are in our cultural, political, social and personal growth - especially when it comes to our outlook on women.

With this recent amendment of the KHAD (Khasi Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment), 2018, this matriliny that the rest of the world raves about as a utopian way of life has been unmasked. We are in a matrilineal system alright, but one that is being run by self-declared patriarchs and defenders of the people. To them the one thing we need to be to be defended against is ourselves apparently - especially the womenfolk. It's like a freaking time warp. Where are we? When are we? Is this the 21st century? Did we take a wrong turn somewhere?

Identity is something that we have always struggled with as a race and the implementation of this bill aims to strip off a very important fabric of this identity from the bare backs of Khasi women. Their loss of identity will make them vulnerable to multiple/intersectional discrimination, both by virtue of being an ethnic minority and by virtue of being a woman in their own community. Those affected by the Bill will have no legal recourse either - as per section 19 of the Khasi Lineage Act, 1997which clearly barsCivil Courts from exercising jurisdiction to deal with a matter to be determined by the Executive Committee - resulting inthem being disempowered and unable to exert a choice.

Article 14 of the Constitution reads that "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India." FurthermoreArticle 15 (1) prohibits the state from discriminating against any citizen on ground of any religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. However, by virtue of Article 15 (4)- the Amendment Bill can be seen as the state's prerogative for taking certain special measures for the "advancement" of the Scheduled Tribe, leading to justify the intersectional discrimination of women which this new amendment undoubtedly seeks to implement. The question that now arises is whether Articles14 and 15 (1) can be overlooked to accommodate Article 15 (4)? And on further analysis of Article 15 (4) another question arises. What is legitimately covered by the term 'advancement'? Is it the addition of a discriminatory clause as the proposed amendment to the act or the removal of traces of discrimination all together?

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The people who framed theKHAD (Khasi Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment), 2018 might be of the opinion that they are not restricting a Khasi woman's choice to marry whom she chooses, but we all know that this is exactly what the amendment does thereby forcing and coercing us women to discriminate based on race. This is not advancement. This is not progress. How can anyone in this day and age support or frame a policy that disenfranchises any woman of her fundamental rights and threatens her with incarceration? And this is being done by turning a social custom (one that has always been in her favour) into a misogynistic tool with which to socially condition her into becoming a racist.

I remember being taught about these incredible concepts called freedom and rights and equality. People have died for them. We sing songs about them. And now this amendment shows up with the intention to curtail one of the most fundamental of our fundamental rights - our choice of whom to share our lives and procreate with. It's political blackmail; it's discriminatory; it's regressive; it should be illegal. But here we are actually pulling each other's hair and clawing each other over it.

So let's go beyond the purview of this law and examine the constitutionality of the Bill itself. The KHADC in pursuance of its powers under Para 3 of the 6th schedule of the Constitution, can make laws pertaining to "social custom", among others. However, for any such social custom to be legally enforceable, it must comprise of two essentials classified as- formative and operative essentials. The first essential includes:

> **antiquity:** The social custom is an age old practice.

> **uniformity/continuity:** The social customhas definitelybeen practised continuously and uniformly over a period of time with stability and no interruptions.

> **Certainty:** where there is clear evidence that the custom is in practice.

> **conscious acceptance as of right:** the custom is consciously accepted as a law by the community.

The second essential includes being reasonable and in accordance with morality, public policy and decency. The KHAD (Khasi Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment), 2018 fails to validate itself in terms of both essentials.

Justice is blind they say and there are similar cases that have been adjudicated in the courts before-sparking backlash and calumny of orthodox groups. One such case is the Goolrukh Gupta case, which hits closer to home. In December 2017, the Supreme Court had to address the question on whether the rights of a Parsi woman married outside her community can be curtailed by the Parsi Anjuman for the purpose of maintaining its regressive religious practices - in this case, losing the right to perform the last rites of her father. The court ruled in favour of the petitioner, observing that a Parsi woman does not lose the right to enter Parsi temples or participate in other Parsi religious ritualsby virtue of her marrying outside her community- "DNA does not evaporate", the Supreme Court had remarked in its judgment. There you go, "DNA does not evaporate." That's the legal system making a landmark judgement using science as the vernacular.

It a sad thing that there is no law against hypocrisy, but for a community whose sense of self preservation is so deluded, we have an insatiable appetite for self destruction. Most of us have adopted an alien religion and worship a foreign god; We have forsaken every aspect of our culture right from rituals, attire, music, dance and yet when a woman is concerned, we expect her to represent the community. I know the women can still wear the traditional attire, but how many men can 'boh' or 'spong' or is it because the burden of all traditional obligations fall only on the women?; We point out the ills of other cultures, but fail to see our own faults - our racism and sexism and hate.

The KHAD (Khasi Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment), 2018 encapsulates all of this and is fuelled by something we cannot seem to keep a check on - fear. And this fear has led us to a path that drags the socio-political evolution (not only of the Khasi people), but off humanity as a whole quite a number of rungs down on the evolutionary ladder. We're right back at the point where and when women (all mothers and daughters and sisters and nieces)have to re-fight the battles that sought to make them equals in the eyes of the law and maybe someday to the predominant chauvinistic male gaze we have all grown up seeing through.

(Dalariti Nongpiur is an entrepreneur living in Shillong. She is the only daughter and stands to inherit the ancestral property she now lives on with her parents. She is married to a Khasi and has a five year old son. She wants no more children.)

(Legal contributions by Philarisa Nongpiur)

Lineage Bill: Amendment for better or for worse?

By Barnes Mawrie

Presently a lot of points and counterpoints are being exchanged among people regarding the amendments made to the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act (second amendment) passed by KHADC. It looks like KHADC has stirred up the hornet's nest and if differences are not sorted out, they are bound to create a lot of chaos in the Khasi society. I have some personal points of view on the issue.

First of all, I see this Act as a kind of corrective effort on the part of KHADC which is the legal body entrusted with the welfare of the Khasi community. In fact, everyone will agree with the CEM that there has been a lot of manipulation and exploitation of Khasi women by non-Khasis who often marry them for ulterior motives. Many times Khasi women are being used as licenses for acquiring tribal land or for business enterprises in the State. Such motives are definitely malicious and ought to be nipped in the bud. In fact, this phenomenon in Khasi society has proven to be a great threat not only to the integrity of our people but even to ancestral land and property. It is a fact that many non-Khasis have succeeded to penetrate into our society and even grabbed away our rice bowl through inter-racial marriages of convenience. In my opinion, this law will certainly put a brake to the acceleration of this socio-cultural phenomenon which is absolutely detrimental to our community.

> *In fact, everyone will agree with the CEM that there has been a lot of manipulation and exploitation of Khasi women by non-Khasis who often marry them for ulterior motives. Many times Khasi women are being used as licenses for acquiring tribal land or for business enterprises in the State.*

Secondly, I do not however subscribe to the approach that KHADC has adopted in trying to correct the imbalances. The Act is too much of a general approach to the problem that demands a particular attention. We can never solve a problem by simply enacting a general law. First of all, KHADC needs to understand that the practices of "ringkpa" and "ringkongor" (whereby a Khasi woman falls in love and desires to marry a non Khasi man), has been in currency for centuries. Therefore there is nothing illegal or strange about it. However, as the old practice used to be, it is understood that a non-Khasi man who married a Khasi woman would himself become integrated into the Khasi community and consequently being a matrilineal society, his off-springs would take the mother's clan name or kur. It is significant that in such marriages, the non-Khasi groom would himself be dressed up in Khasi traditional attires by the uncle of the bride and would be traditionally welcomed into the family. But as of today, such a tradition has almost disappeared and inter-racial marriages today have become almost casual and not traditional. The absence of the kñi's authority today is what has led to this sort of chaos in Khasi society. Unlike in the olden days when the kñi had full control over the marriages of his nephews and nieces, today the kñi does not even know what sort of spouses his nephews and nieces bring home. Yet it would be unjust to implement this law without due qualifications.

In my opinion based on our tradition, if a Khasi woman marries a non-Khasi man, she does not lose her tribal status per se. And until and unless she chooses to adopt her husband's culture and tradition, no law can justify a deprivation of her Khasi status. For this reason, this law would perfectly apply to those Khasi women who have voluntarily chosen to adopt their husband's culture. This law would also be quite appropriate in those cases where children of a non-Khasi father and a Khasi mother, although while retaining lineage from the mother's kur, are not able to speak Khasi or are ignorant about Khasi culture (such cases are frequent in urban areas where children of such inter-racial marriages are encouraged to speak only English at home and as a consequence they are incapable of speaking Khasi. Personally I have come across many such cases). In the case of those inter-racial marriages where there is an explicit agreement that the family retains the Khasi culture and tradition and the children are well versed in Khasi language and culture, this particular law would be totally unjust and uncalled for.

> *It is a fact that many non-Khasis have succeeded to penetrate into our society and even grabbed away our rice bowl through inter-racial marriages of convenience. In my opinion, this law will certainly put a brake to the acceleration of this socio-cultural phenomenon which is absolutely detrimental to our community.*

On the plan of KHADC to abolish "tangkur," I would strongly disapprove of such a move. Tangkur is an age-old practice which has gained universal acceptance in Khasi society. Let us not forget that more than half the Khasi clans have emerged from the practice of tangkur. If the law would be retroactive then it would mean that more than 60% of Khasi population would be lost and if it not (as KHADC has asserted) then it would be totally unjust and partial towards the coming generations. In the case of tangkur, it is a new clan that is being created. History has shown that tangkur has always been a positive step in the growth and development of the Khasi race. If the Khasi race has grown rapidly in population, thanks be to the practice of tangkur. KHADC would commit the greatest blunder to abolish such an ancient cultural practice.

The new law has and will have serious repercussions on Khasi society both now and in the future, therefore it would be better if more reflection and evaluation is done before it is enacted.

TO THE EDITOR

The blind spot in the Lineage Bill

Editor,

As I see it, there is one very significant loophole in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018 which should it be passed, will have a boomerang effect that will in fact expedite the extinction of the entire Khasi society in the next five or ten decades if not earlier.

We can do a simple math. In case a Khasi woman marries a non-Khasi, then, her offspring automatically are regarded as non-Khasi. As a layperson, I think that there is no permissible law in our country by which a mother can be prevented from distributing property to her own children. Therefore the landed property that the mother distributes to her children will automatically fall under non-Khasi category and hence fall outside the purview of the Land Transfer Act. Hence, gradually but surely, with the multiplication of such lands converted to non-tribal areas, it will cause the entire Khasi state to fall outside the purview of the Land Transfer Act, and the outcome of which will therefore prove to be more devastating than the outcome of any other Act that has ever been passed by the Council thus far. Hence the amendment Bill to the Lineage Act will then prove to have been the most stupid move the KHADC has ever made and which will be impossible to reverse as it has checkmated itself. Now, as a layperson, I may be wrong, but, in case I understood the Bill correctly, I may be right.

Yours etc.,
Mankular Lamin
Gashnga
Shillong - 3

On Khasi Lineage Bill

Editor,

I have been following the debates on the controversial Khasi Lineage Bill as telecast in the electronic media of Assam recently and I have the following issues to discuss on the Bill

1. At the outset those who were for the Bill did not have any points to substantiate, only to state that the Bill protects the identity of the Khasis. I wonder why and in what way this Bill protects the Khasis. On the contrary I understand that the Bill will further divide the Khasis into two groups, the pure blooded Khasis and mixed blooded ones.
2. The said Bill was passed by a group of 30 people in haste, to please certain irrational and chauvinistic group of people.
3. If the KHADC has to pass the Bill with good intention it should have taken steps to organize debates and consult various groups and individuals on the matter before moving the said Bill in the KHADC.
4. The Bill intends to divide the Khasi community down the middle instead of uniting this small tribal community with a meager population.
5. The Khasi Lineage Bill violates the rights of citizens enshrined in the Constitution of India and brushes aside the lives and emotions of Khasi society especially of the weaker sections of the society. Therefore those MDCs who are involved in passing such a nasty Khasi Lineage Bill should be voted out and rejected in the next MDC elections, 2019.

Yours etc.,
Bandon L Lyngdoh,
Shillong-1

Draconian Lineage Bill

Editor,

We have been terming certain laws like the TADA, the AFSPA, MPDA, etc. as draconian laws. At present our own KHADC which is supposed to protect the interests of our own people is passing a Bill which is detrimental to their lives and their future. The controversial Khasi Lineage Bill deserves a hash-tag #Draconian#. I may be allowed to enumerate some reasons why this Bill should be quashed.

The said Bill was passed in haste, to please certain individuals/ groups of narrow minded and vindictive people. Before moving such a sensitive issue in the KHADC, the document should have been displayed in the public domain and views and comments should have been invited from all stakeholders followed by wide consultations throughout the state.

No other District Councils in the State have moved such Bill, hence this Bill will further divide the Khasis from the Jaintias and the Garo communities. The intention of the Bill is to distinguish the pure Khasi from the half-breed Khasi.

If, touch wood, this draconian Bill is enacted, many MLAs, MDCs will have to be disqualified and also a number of leaders of pressure groups will have to vacate their posts as they are sons and daughters of non-Khasis.

The Jaintia Hills District Council whose members are wiser and more enlightened than the MDCs of the KHADC have not even dreamt of moving such foolish legislation. Hence, the Jaintias like the Shylla, Rymbai, Passah etc. clans who live in Khasi Hills will claim exemption from the Bill on grounds that they are not natives of Khasi Hills where the writ of the KHADC runs. Then there will be confusion in deciding who should lose the ST status and who should not. Likewise, the Khasis who live outside the jurisdiction of the KHADC will also take advantage of the confusion as this Bill will not take effect there. In the course of the confusion more and more inter marriages will take place and the ultimate beneficiaries will be those who take undue advantage of the situation.

It is a fact that the institution of marriage is sacred, a Human Right and it requires no interference from any angle. Hence, the Khasi Lineage Bill violates the rights of citizens enshrined in the Constitution of India. The Khasi Lineage Bill in its present form also violates the Fundamental Rights. Hence, since the instant Bill is illegal, against the law of the land, we request the Hon'ble Governor and the State Government to set it aside and refrain from approving the Bill.

Yours etc.,
Kerland Wahlang
Shillong -2

" The power of youth is the common wealth for the entire world. The faces of young people are the faces of our past, our present and our future. No segment in the society can match with the power, idealism, enthusiasm and courage of the young people. "

-- Kailash Satyarthi

The Shillong Times

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Social Media: More bane than boon

THAT social media is a great equaliser of the media space is irrefutable. However, it has also become a space where personal attacks, abuse, stalking, trolling has made it a weapon for the release of mental toxins unheard of before. Each time society is at the crossroads the space for dialogue breaks down and people take to social media to release their pent up angst. A crisis therefore is like a pressure cooker valve that allows steam to be released but how. The Khasi Lineage Act Amendment Bill, 2018 passed by the Khasi Hills District Council (KHDC) which says inter alia that a Khasi woman marrying a non-Khasi man will be stripped of her Khasi status and the privileges of a Schedule Tribe, with her children facing the same fate has sharply divided Khasi society like never before. Judging from social media posts which today seem like the societal barometer, those for the Bill are largely male, young, irrational with the, "my way or the highway," attitude writ in every word they spew out. Those who oppose the Bill on the other hand comprise several outspoken young women who have aired their views against the Bill in different media platforms. They have used language and reason to communicate their thoughts and have laid bare their very souls. Anyone who disagrees with them must also use the language of civility. But that seems like asking for too much.

Khasi society claims to be democratic and seeks to remind its members of a hoary past every now and again. We are told that our ancestors argued out societal issues for days on end until a consensus is arrived at. That must have been a carefully cultivated myth for that is not what the society is today. The KHDC chief leads from the front when it comes to crass language and abuse while referring to those who oppose the Bill in question. If people in responsible position can get away with such vile language then it becomes easier for others to do the same and hide in the anonymity that social media affords them. We now see Khasi misogyny upfront and there is no one to temper this down because the statements on social media get them endless applause. At this rate the descent into chaos seems imminent.

Exploring the fears of Khasi society

***"The danger is that in times of crisis we look for a saviour"....* Pope Francis**

By Patricia Mukhim

The above quotation of one of the most vocal church leaders of our times needs deep refection. Khasi society is in a paradox, hovering between the much romanticised matrilineal society that ostensibly gives women and girls a special status and which many believe is gender just and the acrimony of men who feel deprived of their rights in the same society. There has been a simmering discontent underneath the flashy exterior of one of the last surviving matrilineal cultures. Men have publicly expressed their loss of masculinity because the children they father belong to their wife's clan line. And this feeling becomes dominant because Khasi men no longer live in isolation. They compare their own statuses with men from patriarchal societies and as is the case with all human dystopia arising out of several reasons – the quick conclusion is that matriliny is the disempowering factor.

The other bugbear that threatens to explode at this juncture is the culture of inheritance among Khasis. Ancestral property passes through the youngest daughter (khatduh) who is also responsible for caring for the parents in their old age. The khatduh also has several other responsibilities towards her other siblings. But all this is conveniently forgotten in the quest for bringing gender justice in inheritance of property. What is also not based on research is whether the khatduh of the present generation actually inherits property or inherits liabilities? What if it is the latter?

But suddenly we have the Khasi Hills District Council (KHDC) moving an amendment to the Khasi Lineage Bill of 1997 which seeks to strips a Khasi woman of her Khasi status and her privileges as a member of the Scheduled Tribe if she marries a non-Khasi man. That disenfranchisement extends to her children too. The reasons advanced for the need for such amendment is that (a) Khasi women marrying non-Khasis allow themselves to be used for the unholy purposes of conducting business in her name and therefore being exempted from paying taxes and from acquiring a trading licence from the ADCs, in turn depriving them revenue (b) The non-Khasi acquires land in the woman's name and also does business on that land (c) the pure Khasi race is being corrupted by inter-racial marriages (d) Khasi women and their children who marry non-Khasi men adopt the personal laws of their husbands and no longer conform to Khasi customary laws and practices but take advantage of their Khasi status. The KHADC, CEM HS Shylla specifically mentioned Khasi women marrying Muslims as his targets.

The real problems in Khasi society today are (a) economic pressure (b) pressure on land and landlessness (c) inability to compete in a very competitive world (d) inability of many to adapt to the pressures of working outside their homes (e) school and college drop- out rates on the increase (f) no strategies to provide large scale skills training of a sustainable nature to the youth based on the resources available in the state (g) drug addiction (h) dwindling government employment.

The ADCs are supposed to legislate on marriage, divorce and social customs, not to demolish what the ancestors and ancestresses put together in their wisdom and foresight. But the question is whether the KHADC has first problematised the current challenges of Khasi society and invested in ground based research with enough case studies to authenticate its claim that non-Khasi males marrying Khasi women are the bane of this society.

Economic pressure is real so how and why is the Iewduh, our traditional market where rituals are still performed, now taken over by non-Khasi traders? How did the ownership of the stalls pass over to non-Khasis? Iewduh is under the jurisdiction of the Syiem of Mylliem. It is the brief of the Syiem to ensure that stalls do not change hands without due process. It is hard to accept the allegations that all the non-Khasi men owning these stalls are married or cohabiting with Khasi women. There are other methods of transfer which the Councils should have used their wisdom to decipher.

Much rhetoric is flying around about how Khasi women have bartered away their land to their non-Khasi husbands. To establish the veracity of that claim the KHADC should have used a modern tool which those running the state government have resisted for a long time. The KHADC should have sought funds from the Centre for carrying out a cadastral survey of all land in Meghalaya. Only then will we all get to know (a) who owns how much land and where (b) how and when the person acquired the land (c) who is the first owner of the land and how many times has it changed hands?

Instead the Khasi male has now ganged up to spread malicious propaganda that those who oppose the Amended Bill are against the Jaitbynriew Khasi. There is an attempt even by the KHADC chief to demonise dissenters by use of provocative lingo. There is hatred spewed out on social media and threats of rape and murder of those who oppose the Bill. I never imagined that such hatred could reside in the Khasi mind. No wonder we have so many cases of rapes, murders and acts of violence against women and girls. Some people even cite Bible verses to vindicate their claims that inter-racial marriages are against the Bible, without of course paraphrasing those verses.

In the melee what we have all forgotten the scams in the KHADC. A few days ago PN Syiem was accused of spending about Rs 34 crores without any accountability and hence he was brought down. Now that part is forgotten. We are now ready to forego those crores and battle it out on another issue. This is how we are always misled.

It is not understood why a Bill with far reaching ramifications, and if I may say, one that seeks to unseat the much touted matrilineal culture, is not put to public debate. There are many stakeholders to this Bill and not just the KHADC. There are the kurs (clans), the rangbah kur (heads of clans), the Khasi men and women across religions. And no, this Bill cannot be just something organised for television audiences. It must be debated on logic and rationale and keeping the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution in mind.

To conclude I must again quote Pope Francis from an interview he gave to El Pais, a Spanish magazine on January 21, 2017. When asked on how to resolve crises across countries, he said, "Issues must be debated. Debating unites us. A debate in good faith, not with slander nor things like that."

When asked to comment on the crises of growing inequalities and unending crises and leaders that capitalize on the fears of an uncertain future in order to form a message full of xenophobia and hatred towards foreigners, the Pope said, "Crises provoke fear, alarm. In my opinion, the most obvious example of populism in the European sense of the word is Germany in 1933. After the crisis of 1930, Germany was broken, it needed to get up, to find its identity, it needed a leader, someone capable of restoring its character, and there was a young man named Adolf Hitler who says: "I can, I can". And Germans voted for Hitler. Hitler didn't steal power; his people voted for him, and then he destroyed his people. That is the risk. In times of crisis we lack judgment."

Pope Francis goes on to day, "In times of crises people say, let's look for a saviour who gives us back our identity and let us defend ourselves with walls, barbed-wire, whatever, from other people who may rob us of our identity. And that is a very serious thing. That is why I always try to say: talk among yourselves, talk to one another. But the case of Germany in 1933 is typical, a people who were immersed in a crisis, who were searching for their identity until this charismatic leader came and promised to give their identity back, and he gave them a distorted identity, and we all know what happened.

There is a perceived crisis in Meghalaya too. In Police Bazar the pedestrianised path is clogged with hawkers selling garments, shoes and what have you. The Khasi ladies sell their fruits along the sides. No one knows where the non-Khasi hawkers in such large numbers have emerged from; where they stay and who they pay to sell their wares on the footpath. It's the same along the road from Anjalee to Iew Mawlong. Why are these trades unchecked since these are revenue sources that the young Khasis can explore? Who controls this trade? We need to get to the root of this. It's pointless making an issue of customary practices when corruption and failed governance are the real issues.

NRC in Assam: Truth vs myth

By Anirban Choudhury

Finally, the "complete" draft of National Register of Citizens (NRC) was published in Assam on July 30. Much to the relief of both the Centre and State government, it was rather uneventful. While of the 3.29 crore applicants, 2.89 crore made it to the draft, the remaining 40 lakh didn't.

The publication of the draft NRC managed to draw "national" media attention too, but for all the wrong reasons. For, unlike mainstream media reports, lakhs of immigrants will not be hounded out as is being reported, neither the Centre nor State government are involved in the updation process and those left out include "indigenous" people too. Mamata Banerjee and Congress president Rahul Gandhi (though it was during Congress regime that the process started) with their utterly ridiculous and provocative comments have only reinforced such a perception among many in rest of the country. The media and political leaders may have their own agenda in hyping fears, but, nothing can be further from truth.

For the record, it was one of the most rigorous exercises where applicants were required to prove their residency in the State prior to 1971 or their legacy. It's unfair to attribute any motive, especially because the entire exercise was carried out at the directive and under total supervision of Supreme Court.

While the implications of non-inclusion of approximately 40 lakh individuals are yet to be fully felt, updating the NRC in Assam could open a virtual floodgate of demands from other States with groups seeking similar registry to insulate them from "outsiders". And there are already groups in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura clamouring for similar legal protection. Manipur Legislative Assembly has already passed the controversial Manipur People's Bill, 2018 that fixed 1951 as the base year for distinguishing the indigenous from non-indigenous. This led to violence in Jiribam area where a sizeable non-indigenous population reside and which is opposed to it on the grounds that when Manipur attained statehood in 1972, how can 1951 be considered the base year.

Actually, Assam is the only State to have an NRC based on the census of 1951. As the issue of immigration was intrinsically linked with Assam's history since early 20th century, especially in the backdrop of the country's partition in 1947, due to which the State witnessed a huge influx from then East Pakistan, it was considered prudent to prepare the NRC then.

The entire issue of updating NRC first cropped up when the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) submitted a memorandum to the Centre on 18th January 1980 during the six-year Anti Foreigners' Movement in the State. The AASU continued raking up the issue thereafter, before the then NDA government at the Centre agreed in principle to update the NRC during a tripartite meeting in New Delhi involving representatives of the Centre, State government and AASU on 17th November 1999.

This one-of-its-kind exercise in any part of the globe to determine citizenship, however, the decision to update the NRC was taken during another tripartite meeting involving officials of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), State government and AASU representatives in New Delhi on 5th May 2005. Then Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi was also present at the meeting, which was presided over by then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, who committed himself to update the NRC by September 2007.

The tripartite meeting followed a dramatic turn of events in 2004 – the AASU had declared a boycott of Singh when the latter's visit to Guwahati was scheduled in November-end to flag off the first Indo-ASEAN car rally. Accusing the Centre of dilly-dallying with the implementation of the Assam Accord and holding Singh responsible for it, the students' body had declared that it would halt his visit at any cost.

Faced with an embarrassing situation where the Prime Minister's visit is jeopardised in front of Heads of States of ASEAN countries and national and international media, Gogoi called an emergency meeting with AASU representatives and assured them that he would fix a meeting for them with Singh. Following this, the AASU had withdrawn its boycott call. Thereafter, the tripartite meeting was held in New Delhi on 5th May 2005 wherein the decision was taken to update the NRC on the basis of NRC of 1951 and electoral rolls up to 1971.

After sitting on it for five years, both New Delhi and Dispur decided to take up the exercise in Chaygaon and Barpeta revenue circles in 2010 as a pilot project. But, after widespread violence in Barpeta that left four persons dead in July that year, the Gogoi government immediately called off the project.

The NRC update was then put on cold storage till the Supreme Court heard a public interest litigation filed by Assam Public Works (APW), an NGO, on July 20, 2009. The APW had sought directives from the apex court to the Central and State governments to correct Assam's electoral rolls as the organisation alleged that names of 41 lakh illegal immigrants had been included in them. It was then that both the Centre and State government told the Supreme Court that since the NRC was being updated, the matter would be automatically taken care of as those names not included in the NRC would not be included in the electoral rolls too.

That was how the NRC update came became the onus of the apex court. Subsequently, the AASU was made a party to the case. The Supreme Court, after hearing all parties then issued a directive in 2013 that the NRC be updated. Acordingly, the process was initiated in 2014 and enrolment started in 2015. The Court had set post midnight of 31st December 2017 as deadline for publication of the first NRC draft after constant follow-ups with the authorities concerned – Registrar General of India (RGI) and Office of the State Coordinator of NRC, Assam. Earlier, the NRC update had missed the deadline of 31st December 2015. Though both the RGI and NRC State Coordinator had sought extension of the deadline on more than one occasion, the apex court had stuck to its gun with the deadline of post midnight 31st December 2017 for publication of the first part draft of NRC.

The rest is history. At the stroke of 12 on New Year's Day, fate of 1.90 crore individuals were decided in the first part NRC draft, while the remaining 1.39 crore names were included in the "complete draft" on July 30. Authorities concerned once again reiterated that "genuine" Indians shouldn't be perturbed as they would be given another chance to include their names even while all foreigners would be excluded. The reason for the somewhat tardy progress thus far was largely attributed to non-completion of verification of documents, which too was a colossal 6.50 crore, to validate proof of residency and legacy of the 3.29 crore applicants.

(The writer can be reached at eternalflame2000@gmail.com)

TO THE EDITOR

Health hazards from mobile towers

Editor,

Scientific reports on biological effect of cell tower radiation on human health are a grave concern. To get signals cell towers are erected at strategic places with receivers and transmitters attached to them. Receivers receive the signal from their respective suppliers and transmitters transmit the signal to cell phones and other devices wherever radiation could penetrate. The type of radiation transmitted from the towers is the electromagnetic radiation that is similar to that of sunlight but, radiation from mobile towers is seriously detrimental as told by physicists.

According to the report on "Cell Tower Radiation" submitted by Prof. G. Kumar, Electrical Engineering Department, IIT Bombay to Secretary, DOT, Delhi, in 2010, one mobile operator may transmit 50-100 W of power and so, more operators on the same tower or in the same location, means more power and more radiation. Cell towers transmit radiation 24 x 7, so people living within 10's of meters from the tower will receive signal that is 10,000 to 10,000,000 times stronger than what is required for mobile communication.

India adopted radiation norms of 4.7 W/m2 for GSM 900. However, serious health effects have been noted even at low as 0.0001 W/m2. A few countries have adopted 0.001 W/m2 or even lower. The biological effects due to microwave radiation from mobile towers include: risks to children (softer skull, softer bones-easier for radiation to penetrate), risks to pregnant women, infertility, DNA damage, interference with pacemakers used in the body, effects on skin, ear and eye damage, weakening of bones, sleep disorder, tumours, brain diseases, increased cancer risk. Apart from having a detrimental impact on human health, radiation from mobile towers affects animals and plants as well. There are so many studies that have been carried out on this issue and one can get these reports on the internet.

I want to draw your attention to the locality where I reside at Mawlai Mawdatbaki, Pata-A where two tall towers were erected in 2005-2008 near many houses, some of them only a few meters away. One of the towers belongs to Airtel and the other to Vodafone. Last week, some technicians came to connect some device to the Vodafone tower. When asked, they said they are connecting Jio to the tower. Surprised and shocked, that day we came to know that Vodafone sold the tower to a company known as ATC, already two operators namely IDEA and BSNL are using the same tower as told by the land owner. Therefore, the two existing mobile towers are catering to 5 operators that are transmitting radiation non-stop.

Operators of mobile towers must be strictly instructed that power density inside residential or office buildings, schools, hospitals, should be within specified guidelines. Residents staying in close proximity to the towers must be informed about the harmful effect of radiation.

The crucial questions are: (1) Are network operators aware of health risks and do they follow the radiation norms and guidelines? (2) Do they have a Radiation meter to check the intensity of radiation regularly? (3) Who will be responsible for the health risks of people staying within close proximity to mobile towers? (4) Is the Government/ telecom department aware of the sharing of towers by many operators and so, the strength of radiation transmitted by these operators together?

I therefore urge land owners to first understand the health risks involved when they lease their land to companies to accommodate mobile towers. I also urge those in seats of authority to rethink the situation and minutely assess the health risks involved and look for alternatives to remove the towers from residential areas and relocate them in areas where they would not pose a blatant hazard to public health, and at the same time be able to serve the needs of the public in terms of allowing enough scope for mobile phones to access signals. I strongly urge the public to understand the ill effects of radiation and therefore to stand united for an issue like this for the greater good of society.

We need telephone, internet and other modes of technology but not to the detriment of our health.

Yours etc.
Bashida Massar,
Via email

Fish ban in Meghalaya

Editor,

On the captioned subject I would like to ask the following questions:

1. Is it right not to ban sale of fish imported by the state of Meghalaya despite the fact that the fish reaches the traders after 15 to 20 days of transit. So it is natural to say that the fish imported into Meghalaya is injected with formalin which is used to keep dead fish fresh. So how can imported fish to our state be declared formalin free?

2 We are part of the problem if we don't ban and rather provide supplementary proof and evidences for absence of formalin. The earlier statement of the Health Minister not to ban sale of fish imported to Meghalaya is uncalled for.

3 There is something fishy about fish from Andhra Pradesh that has raised concerns in the states of Goa , Assam, Nagaland and Manipur resulting in the ban in the sale of such fish after they were detected to be having formalin.

4 It is pathetic that the Khasi Jaintia Whole-seller and Retailer Association President Mitchell Wankhar is part of the problem by claiming that the fish supplies that reach Shillong City from other states are safe and chemical free whereas the whole of India is scared of formalin as it is known to be carcinogenic.

5 Facts cannot be ignored as the citizens of the city are quite aware of the consequences and rather plead for a solution to the Health Minister without any self interest for non-hazardous and healthy food. We in the Health Department are more concerned as to how such a test cannot be successfully conducted in our own State.

Yours etc.,
Kyrshanboklang
Lyngdoh
Shillong- 3

" Every judgement of conscience, be it right or wrong, be it about things evil in themselves or morally indifferent, is obligatory, in such wise that he who acts against his conscience always sins. "

-- Thomas Aquinas

The Shillong Times

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Adultery and law

THE world changes rapidly but societies are resistant to change. Legal or judicial mechanisms, once set in place, more often than not fail to acknowledge or reflect the changes. Little wonder then that judges are generally seen as men far removed from ground realities. The law for them is sacrosanct irrespective of the harm it can cause to societies in changing circumstances.

Thankfully the Supreme Court is seized of a matter concerning adultery. Under existing Indian law, namely Section 497 of IPC, a man committing adultery would earn a seven-year jail term, whereas the woman involved in the act would go unpunished. An argument now advanced is that the woman is as guilty as the man. Fact is that adultery is not uncommon, even if this is unacceptable in conservative societies like in India. The law in question is over 150 years old. Through several generations and faced with currents and cross-currents, Indian society today is vastly different from what it was over a century ago. But law remains the same, unless a change is effected on a piecemeal level as is sought to be done in the present case through a Public Interest Litigation.

In several countries the laws on adultery have changed. Notably our neighbouring countries, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and China have de-criminalized adultery. Predictably, the notable exceptions in this part of the world are the Islamist nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh alongside India. The issue, per se, should not limit itself to the discrimination in law between men and women, but to the issue of adultery and the near-life jail term - seven years -- accorded to the guilty. Licentious behaviour is not acceptable in any society. There have to be safeguards as also checks and balances, but in ways that accommodate the circumstances of a changing world vis-à-vis slow-changing societies.

It is a fact that several Indian laws are now archaic. The Indian legal system built on the lines of the British laws has often ignored the realities existing in local societies. Parliament is a forum to introduce new laws and change old laws. But, year after year, hardly any discussion takes place in the two houses before bills are passed. More laws are coming into force in a flurry. In this process, there is more of disruption of proceedings and less of saner arguments. A century is a long-enough time to revisit an Indian law. The 158-year-old law on adultery, for instance, needs closer scrutiny.

Khasi lineage amendment bill - Over-simplified proposed solutions

By T Sohtun

The "Khasi Social Custom of Lineage, Second Amendment Bill, 2018", passed by The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), hereafter referred to as the "Bill, 2018" has rightly generated a series of debates on social media. This shows that we are serious about our Khasi culture and our Khasi land. I feel that this is the time to view our opinions however tiny that drop of idea might contribute. In a debate there are those who speak for a motion, and those against the motion. It is never a personal attack. Debate is argument about a subject, not about how long or short your nose is. The solution might be somewhere in between. This Bill seeks to redefine our Khasi identity. Let us be serious.

THE PROBLEM

Some of the major social and economic problems that pose as threats to the interest of the Khasi Tribe (perceived or actual) that was at the backdrop of the Bill could be:

1. There is a fear that the Khasi culture is in imminent danger of extinction!
2. The land, jobs, and other benefits meant only for the Khasi people are being snatched away by non-Khasis.
3. That many non-Khasi men use "Khasi-women" only as a password to gain access to those privileged classified files of the State!

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION

The Khasi Tribe is surely increasing. When we go to the villages, the rapid rise in population is very glaring. The streets are filled with children; the schools are overcrowded; unwed mothers and her children are on the rise; and there is not enough land for all. What we actually mean to say is that there is an alarming increase of influx of non-Khasis who come illegally (foreigners) or legally as Indians. So influx is to be addressed.

It is a historical fact that many Khasi women are marrying non-Khasi men, whether Indians or foreigners, and likewise the men. Why so? We need to ask and introspect. Will inbreeding help to foster and promote a vibrant, competitive, and progressive Khasi culture?

It is a common allegation that jobs are being "sold out" to "anyone" who can pay, otherwise reserved only for few privileged Khasis who have "godfathers". Job applications and interviews are shams! In which case a Khasi who deserves the job will never get it! Can we say then that corruption is "anti-Khasi"?

TRIANGULAR PERSPECTIVE

What does the "Bill, 2018" in its present form aim to Protect/Promote/Correct?

Let us look at the merits and demerits of the proposed Bill from the triangular perspective: The Khasi Lineage system; the ownership of the land; Schedule Tribe (ST) issues.

A. Khasi Tribe, its lineage system.

a) As of now, the Khasi lineage is traced through the mother. The mother's offspring are named after her clan/Kur's name, irrespective of whether the father is a Khasi or non-Khasi. In general this is what is also termed as matrilineal.

b) The Khasi lineage is also propagated through the father through the ceremony of "tangjait", an initiation whereby, a father who marries a non-Khasi woman can "create" a new clan. Some fathers have given their own "jait" directly to their children (patrilineal style).

c) As of now, the children born out of the above marriages (a & b) are equally considered as Khasi offspring.

B. Land ownership: In simplistic terms, three kinds of ownership of land in Khasi Hills, excluding those of government lands are practiced.

a) Community lands: These lands belong to the "Kur" or "Clan", which are exclusively owned by the women of that clan. They have a Rangbah-Kur (clan-chief) but he himself has no right to use it even for his personal sustenance.

The lands that belong to the village community: Irrespective of one's clan, all village members are entitled to its use. The Rangbah-Shnong (village headman) administers such lands.

b) Individually owned lands: The legal holders of such lands can be a man or a woman, either inherited from parents, or purchased with cash. Such lands in majority of cases will be inherited by their daughters, especially the youngest one. Though it is an encouraging sign that more and more parents distribute their lands equally among their children, for both, boys and girls.

c) NGO owned lands: These constitute lands owned by companies and NGO's for the purpose of industry, education, agriculture, etc.…

In short, even without statistical facts, one can say that in Khasi Hills, the bulk of lands belong to the women. This is something typical of a matrilineal system.

C. Reserved Categories (ST): Some of the important components that fall within the Schedule Tribe category status are: reservation in education and employment, exemption and privileges in business (e.g. tax exemption, trading license, etc.…).

SOME SOLUTIONS BUT MORE PROBLEMS

Since according to the proposed Bbill, a khasi woman who marries a non-Khasi man and her offspring shall be deemed as "non-Khasis", then the bill will basically protect ownership of the land to a great extent and reservation benefits of the Khasis. But the number of Khasis deemed as "non-Khasis" will continue to rise. We can expect that most of the young people marry out of love and hardly reason out the consequences. We will have not just one, buta series of generations of people who look Khasi, dress Khasi, speak Khasi, sing Khasi songs, eat Khasi food, but are called non-Khasi or "Khasi - Dkhar", just because their blood was mixed at one point. These so called "non-Khasis" will in turn intermarry with Khasi girls, thus producing a series of such kind of off-springs. The children will have to pay for the transgressions of their parents or ancestors. We can expect a terrible identity crisis!

As of now we already have so many children abandoned by their fathers, in the absence of proper marriage legislation. This has created a great social problem already.

Therefore, the merit of this Bill seems to be in generating more questions and discussions than it tries to answer.

Questions that the Bill needs to answer:

1. What if a khatduh or Khasi daughter (who is entitled to inherit her parent's property) marries a non-Khasi? Can the children have legal right to claim to it? If not, whose will it be? The Bill needs to reflect the repercussions of its application too.
2. A tribe cannot grow only by preservation alone, but also by propagation. In the case of the "tang-jait" (father's side) this has served to increase the number of Khasi clans, and the Bill silently endorses it. But what is the problem in accepting the matrilineal tradition? There seems to be an inconsistency in this Bill.
3. What will be the social status of such couples and their children in a village or locality? Will it be illegal, say, if a particular clan/village allows such daughter who married a non-Khasi to still be part of the social and customary functions?
4. Define who is a "Khasi". What are the criteria that makes one a Khasi? Are they based on one's origin, such as his/her clan? Some Khasi clan is clearly stated as "Dkhar"! Are those Khasis born outside the state (e.g. Assam), or outside the country (e.g. Bangladesh), be called Khasi? And if language is the criteria, then how much versatile should one be in the Khasi language: reading, speaking, and writing to get an ST (Khasi) certificate?
5. The Bill seems to project women marrying non-Khasi men as enemies of the Khasi tribe. Hence they are forced to strip off their very culture, land, and family, only to be called a "non-Khasi Kong" henceforth! Such women and their families still can make contribution to the development of the Khasi society.
6. The practical problems in the implementation of the Bill is that it will lead to malpractices, manipulation, buying and selling of ST certificates. We have not even implemented the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, so what is the mechanism to check who is married to whom, where, when?
7. What if the Government of India one day amends the Constitution and abolishes all reserved categories, and declares that every Indian has the right to own land, reside, work, and travel anywhere within the territory of India?
8. At most the Bill would have appeared more humane if it had stated, "If any Khasi woman marries a non-Khasi man, her husband and her offspring(s) born out of such marriage(s) shall have no claim under law to those special privileges and benefits that of the Khasi Tribe".

In conclusion, I would say that it is the common responsibility of every Khasi man and woman to preserve and promote our rich and valued cultural heritage. Our beautiful Khasi and Jaintia Hills with their natural beauty and freshness and the beautiful people is a land coveted by many. It is the only land we can call our own. Once we lose it, it is gone forever. However, the common solution should come by way of integration, not by segregation.

Our legislators (MLA/MDC) need to put their heads together to come up with more comprehensive legislations, such as Bills that will also address mechanisms to check influx, illegal immigration, corruption, transparency in governments, and protection and ownership of the land.

The Bill in its present form might appear at face value good but on detailed scrutiny is found to be very inadequate.

Mamata makes her pitch, but oh no!

Bengal CM flashes banner of anarchy

By Aditya Aamir

And in this heart of darkness/Our hope lies on the floor/All love like flame is fleeting/When there is no hope anymore. So we feel, many of us, as 2019 general elections close in on us in a relentless caterpillar-walk. The caterpillar eats distance in a hump-and-slide manner and watching one cover the floor is to come prepared with time to spare, loads of sand to trickle!

Rahul Gandhi seems to have it. Not Mamata Banerjee. Both compete to look shabbier than the other. But it's Mamata who can act shabbier. Rahul told the world earlier this year he wants to be Prime Minister. Mamata has now put her "hat in the ring". It has come to rest next to Mayawati's high-end handbag.

Both ladies want to replace Narendra Modi. There's this feeling mounting that if Rahul steps to the neutral corner, mum Sonia Gandhi will throw her lot behind Mayawati because the BSP supremo will be far fairer to the Congress than the street-and-tumble artist from Kolkata.

West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has the discerning eye. He has read up on history and has knowledge of the animal kingdom. Adhir identifies Mamata to a Trojan horse. And a "chameleon". Add to them 'volatile', 'violent' and 'not above dubious' and Mamata is a package that should not cross the gates of 7, Race Course Road!

India has been waiting for a Bengali Prime Minister. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose fit the yearning. But history and lifeline overrode the sentiment. Then, opportunity knocked on communist Jyoti Basu's door. He, out of some inexplicable sentiment, chose to present his back. Now, pushing for the post, there is 'in-your-face' Mamata Banerjee - insistent, persistent…shrill!

Sorely, 'Didi' doesn't come with an assurance. Her policy is yet to work wonders in West Bengal despite premiums paid. Why should it deliver on the centre-stage? West Bengal, with aspirations to become 'Bangla', looks as shabby as the leader at its top. The state's human development indices are wobbly. Homeless abound in the City of Joy. The debt burden can sink the Titanic. Roads are in disarray. Streets have been taken over by Trinamool goons. Fat cats do not want to invest. Industry shrinks before Mamata's eyes.

Mamata's talk of 'civil war' and 'bloodbath' is a warning to the nation of divisive politics as well as a pointer to the kind of person she is. Mamata will keep every Indian on his toes, wary and suspicious of the other, wondering where the 'Gandasa' is kept hidden - bedroom or the attic! If nothing, the Assam NRC has brought this out into the open.

Is Mamata with "genuine Indians" or is she aligned with "illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators?" is no longer the question. She can't say there isn't one "illegal in Assam, Bengal and the entire north-east" because in 2005 she threw sheaves of them head-first on the Lok Sabha Speaker's Chair, insisting that they be evicted, pronto, from West Bengal.

When her turn came, with the power to evict, Mamata chose not to take notice. Today, suspected illegals are those on whose back Mamata wants to give notice to the 'Mahagathbandhan' that she wants a change of residence. A Bengali Prime Minister is maybe what India needs. But Mamata Banerjee?

The banner Mamata holds up is a sign of anarchy. The template, which delivered Bengal to her, cannot be the one duplicated at the Centre. The spectacle at the Assam airport the other day is a sign of things to come if Mamata gets her way and becomes Prime Minister of India. Her cavalier manner doesn't suit the high office. Mamata is tough. But her kind of toughness is not what India requires.

Mamata's record speaks. 'Roughshod' is her style. She treats defence personnel like she owns the stable if not the horses. Unlike Jayalalithaa, she doesn't ask bureaucrats to go full 'shashtaang' at her feet, but they nevertheless quaver in their shoes, knowing that she's as capricious as a bouncing rubber ball.

The only ones who can stop Mamata are the leaders of the 'Mahagathbandhan'. They should take her into a vault and ask her to retreat. Or, close the vault door on her and throw the keys into another vault with a combination lock. The Trinamool is a one-state party. With 40 lakh less voters, Assam is already lost to Mamata. 'Bengali Hindu' voters in her own state must be in two minds. Trinamool has no standing in any other Indian state.

(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Demeaning mothers is ungodly

Editor,

Apropos the letter, 'Why demean our mothers?' by Sujit De, (ST, July 26, 2018), and other letters by the same writer which were direct or veiled attacks on a particular faith and its culture, I have to say that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. But far more dangerous is when that little knowledge is spread in society and propelled by the fuel of prejudice.

Having read that letter I immediately contacted some of the top scholars in Kerala for hands-on verification on whether 'women' are being despised or not. Since one of my books is translated into their language, I did that with ease. Not a single scholar (women included) was of the view that they, or the temple management of Sabarimala, have ever "despised women", or hated "menstruation". I rather got an earful for asking such absurd questions. They instantly reiterated referring to Hindu scriptures which teach all and one to look upon women as motherly figures. One scholar remarked, "this confrontation has actually been orchestrated by politicians with the help of certain forces which want to demean our culture." I heaved a sigh of relief!

Indeed all ancient Hindu scriptures put the female on the same footing as the male. But some vested interests with an ulterior motive have been distorting history/legends of India and also merrily belittling or ignoring the rich literary treasure trove of the country. It was first done by the British in order to divide and rule Indians. In that they were very successful. And later, the legacy has been faithfully and aggressively carried forward by Indian intellectuals influenced by certain thinkers of the West.

Well, the seers of ancient India not only knew as information, but "fully realized" that everything, in and out, is pervaded by "Brahman" (Almighty). Modern science too has arrived at the same conclusion. The father of Quantum Mechanics -- Erwin Schrodinger has scientifically discussed this fact in his world-famous book - "What is Life?." All knowledge associated with the Oneness of the Universe and "Unity in Diversity" are systematically enshrined in 108 Upanishads. They expound with a force that "Purusha" (male) and "Pratriki" (female) both combine themselves to put forth the infinite Cosmic Creation. One without the other is like fire without the heat. They are mutually complementary, inter-dependent and interrelated. Discrimination of any kind, not just against women, but even against tiny "insects" and "plants" are considered irreligious. I would request Sujit De to read between the lines from the literature authored by Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda which he loves to quote very often. If still his doubts persist then let him contact me directly. But then he should come to me with the baggage of prejudices well shaken off first.

Regarding menstruation, the seers of ancient India set down certain do's and don'ts. It's no exaggeration that they realized all intricacies of not only the tangible body and but also the various sheaths of "spiritual" bodies (five sheaths mentioned in Upanishads). The areas of study are very vast. They caution that a woman during her monthly cycle should abstain from religious public rituals, but can perform personal spiritual practice. Of course several do's and don'ts set by ancient seers are beyond the understanding of mundane people with limited five senses and scattered minds. It is absurd to interpret this as a practice of "untouchability". A medical doctor will never allow you to enter the ICU unless you are well washed. Is not everything there meticulously sterilized? Do you say that the hospital is practicing untouchability? Going through the letters of Sujit De which are not well researched I fervently wish that one has deeper knowledge of the subjects. Moreover, the cosmic ocean of Indian wisdom is so deep, that it has explained many inconceivable laws and principles which are seemingly out-of-the -box and discriminatory.

I suggest that Mr De should stop selectively picking up a few odds and using them to demean this vast culture of knowledge. The Vedanta should not be viewed through the narrow prism of Karl Marx and Lenin. Even their favorite master Fredrick Hegel (front ranking philosopher of the West), with reverence praised the depth of ancient wisdom, "It strikes everyone in beginning to form an acquaintance with the treasures of Indian literature, that a land so rich in intellectual products and those of the "profoundest" order of thought". How I wish that a dagger is not wielded by an untrained person else it will be disastrous! Yours etc.,

Salil Gewali,
Via email

Progress and change

Editor,

George Bernard Shaw said, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." If we want to make progress, we must have the courage to find our own faults and then start rectifying them. Those who think that they are absolutely perfect persons have unfortunately reached a dead end in their inner journey.

It is hardly possible to change others by words. However, there is always room for self-purification not according to any ritual or religion but in the light of humanity. When we become successful in improving in just one aspect of our character, we naturally become living examples of that very quality and send positive inspirations to others to follow suit. It is rightly said that actions speak louder than words.

The problem arises when our minds get tired and pessimistic. In such an unhealthy condition of mind, we start glorifying the past and labeling the present as totally bad. It is true that we need always to be critical about the present and should find ways for improvement. But it does not mean that we must go backwards. There is no way to deny that things were much uglier during primitive jungle raj, in ancient slave society or in police states than in modern times of welfare states.

"Progress is the attraction that moves humanity", said Marcus Garvey. When we do not feel that attraction, we, so to speak, stop living. There is a beautiful saying in Bengali ~ joto din banchi toto din shikhi ~ it means that we learn so long as we live.

A person must always try to be humane; otherwise it will be like writing his or her own obituary. As the Mother (spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo) said, "The purpose of earthly life is progress. If you stop progressing you will die. Every moment that you spend without progressing is one step closer to your grave."

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.



FRAMES OF INDIA

By Piyush Prakash

Roger Chen, minister-counsellor at the High Commission of Canada in New Delhi, is an avid travel photographer, trying to capture diverse cultures, traditions and customs he has been privileged to witness.

Street scenes and people at large are also his forte. He found ample scope to expand his area of interest in India, a land known for its cultural diversity. The 28 photographs he showed under the title "Devotion- A Journey through India" recently at an exhibition — 'Coffee with Leica' — at the Leica's store in Delhi showcased his candid eye for moods and scenes on Indian streets.

"Street photography is not just another type of photography; rather it's a way of your lifestyle which you intend to exhibit," says Chen.

When it comes to Indian street photography, you might see a lot of enthusiastic individuals who capture the essence of this beautiful country, but for Chen it has been more than just capturing the scenes.

Reading between the lines

"I am intent on conveying a message. Every picture of mine has one," Chen says. As a diplomat he has been a globe-trotter and has captured images from many countries in the world.

In India, he started with clicking historical monuments and other pieces of art connected with the country. But gradually he veered from the tried and tested and started exploring other ideas. Street photography caught his attention.

The essence of street photography is rather eclectic. Celebrated photographer Raghu Rai through his street photographs has captured many aspects of people on Indian streets.

Then again, capturing images is as difficult as it is to rearrange them in order to form a series to exhibit. This is what Chen aimed at while clicking the pictures shown at the exhibition. They establish a sense of relationship between people in their day to day lives, whether reflecting camaraderie, or a visual symmetry through images of religious faith and rituals play which are an important part in people's lives in India.

Inspiring the minds

After the Bollywood movie *3 Idiots* (2009) was released, a number of youngsters picked up cameras after getting inspired by its character Farhan who fought against odds so that he could establish his career as a photographer. Inspiration and guidance from seniors often give that push to aspiring but hesitant photographer-would-be. Hence Chen decided to involve the audience present at the exhibition with his insightful talk on his experience.

Along with Vineet Vohra, ambassador of Leica, Chen shared his experiences on how clicking pictures in India was difficult for them.

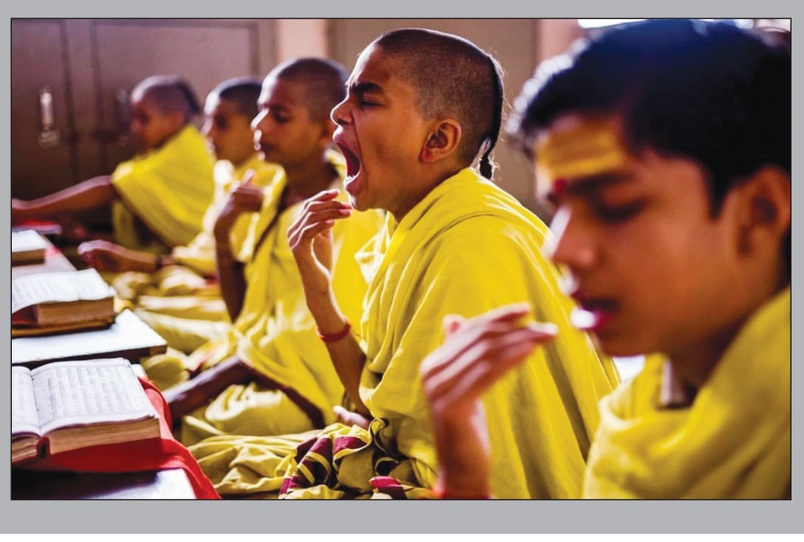
Street photography is an art which is mostly done by the people on their mobile phones, but the reason why Chen chose Leica M10 and a 35mm f/1.4 Summilux for this project was because he felt this equipment was better at catching the emotions, liveliness and connections between the viewer and the photographs.

Acceptance is important

"I always try to keep myself around the people whom I want to click. I make sure that the people accept my presence and they don't look at me when I'm clicking them," Chen said when asked how he managed to click such pictures with a story running behind them. "Sure, it's hard most of the time as the people don't like when someone clicks them. People get conscious as soon as someone especially a foreigner points out a camera at them," He added.

Talking about his experience in India, Chen says, "It's one of the most fascinating countries in the world. Most probably because of that, photographers flock to India to capture festivals like Holi, Diwali and Dussehra." (IBNS-TWF)









Images by Canadian diplomat Roger Chen (right). He showed 28 photographs under the title 'Devotion- A Journey through India' recently at an exhibition in Delhi

Friendship takes back seat in Indian TV shows

By Natalia Ningthoujam

Long before Sourabh Raaj Jain got comfortable doing mythological shows, he was popular for starring in 'Remix' that celebrated the bond of friendship. Even Kishwer Merchant was known for 'Hip Hip Hurray', which again brought friendship to the forefront. But now, even though the protagonist's friendship with his or her friend continues to be a 'crucial part' of some shows, they no longer contribute to the central plot.

Friendship Day is on August 5, but if you are planning to binge on Indian TV shows based on friendship, you would be disappointed.

Shows like 'Hip Hip Hurray' (1998-2001), 'Just Mohabbat' (1996-2000), 'Remix' (2004-2006), 'Left Right Left' (2006-2008) and 'Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin' (2003-2006) will always be remembered for presenting the strong bond between friends.

But if we look at the current list of shows, friendship has certainly taken a back seat, barring few.

"They are not completely (gone), but yes, the number has definitely reduced," Kishwer told IANS.

She also doesn't mind a new version of 'Hip Hip Hurray'.

"Yeah, why not? But if it is made, it won't be the same. We also tried making season two, but it wasn't the same. It can't have original characters with somebody else playing us, as people are used to us playing those characters," she said.

Sourabh also misses such shows.

"I would be one of the happiest people if a 'Remix' reboot happens and I would love to be a part of it. I think shows like 'Remix' and others based on friendship, schools and colleges are more geared towards the urban audience.

"Our TRPs and numbers tend to come from all over India including Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. While our urban audience can relate to 'Remix', our rural audience doesn't. Hence, the numbers deter our makers from creating more such shows," said the 'Mahakali - Anth Hi Aarambh Hai' actor.

It might not be the central plot, but ZEE TV's Business Head Deepak Rajadhyaksha shared that the theme of friendship figures amongst the "gamut of subjects that hold a universal family appeal".

"We have had shows where the protagonist's friendship with his or her closest pal is a very crucial part of the narrative, even if it may not be the central plot."

Citing examples, he said: "'Ishq Subhan Allah', which is essentially a love story set against the backdrop of religion, also tells the story of our protagonist Zara's friendship with her Hindu friend Reema.

"Throughout the tenure of 'Kumkum Bhagya', it has shown our male lead Abhi's friendship with his best friend Purab as a strong focal point of several sub-plots. So, while you may not peg these shows as being based on friendship, they do depict the dynamics of meaningful friendships that viewers can relate to."

"Yeh Un Dinon Ki Baat Hai" is another show which chronicles the adolescent romance between Naina and Sameer but it is incomplete without Sameer's friends Munna and Pandit.

"Through Sameer, Munna and Pandit's friendship, the show's makers have highlighted multiple facets of an ever-lasting friendship and shown the importance of understanding, honesty, dependability and loyalty," said Raghav Dhir, who plays Pandit in the show set in the 90s.

"What our show highlights is the true meaning of friendship which was an important aspect of the 90s," he added.

His co-star Sanjay Choudhary said: "Real friendship is being presented in an efficient way. All aspects of a strong bond are being picturised in an artistic way."

"In real life also, the friendship of Sameer, Munna and Pandit is real. Whenever we are done for the day, we make sure that we call each other and talk if we haven't been shooting together."

Writer Manoj Santoshi said his show "Jijaji Chhat Per Hai" is based on the pillar of friendship.

"We have Pancham and Pintu who are committed to becoming music directors together and stay together forever. Murari and Chhote also portray this beautiful relation of friendship," he said.

And then there's director-writer Sonam Nair's 'The Trip 2'.

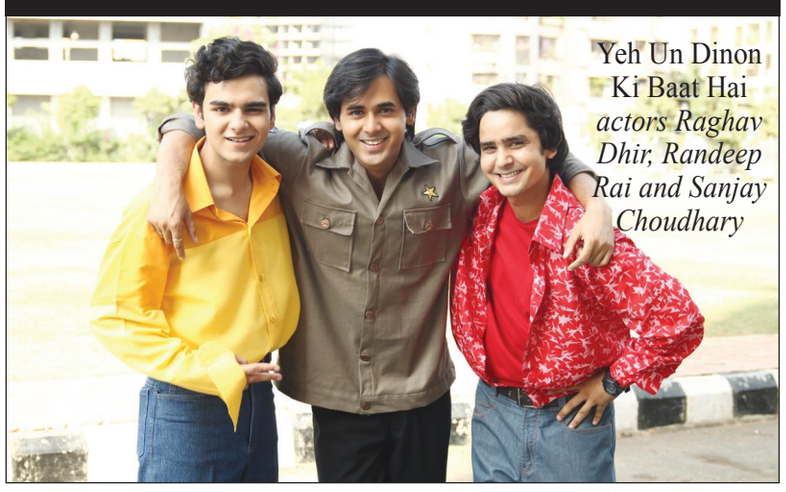
"The show is about four women who are strong and at the same time helping each other and being strong as that's how things are in my life. My female friends are most important to me and we help each other in our journeys. It's important to show this side also in Indian public instead of just showing the opposite side," she said. She agreed that an entire show is not made on friendship so much.

"Other things are more popular and take precedence. I don't know why that is, because I think our culture from the time we were in school, college to workplace, friendship has been deeply rooted in our society.

"Everyone is warm to each other and stand by their friend much more than western culture. In western culture, friendship is not as warm and deep as in India as friends here are more like a family. I am glad that 'The Trip' is one of the few shows that highlight friendship as it's a pure concept."

And we are sure the viewers want more. *(IANS)*

Friendship Day today



Yeh Un Dinon Ki Baat Hai actors Raghav Dhir, Randeep Rai and Sanjay Choudhary

Art of being a leader

By Imtitoshi Ao

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. — John Quincy Adams

Do you believe that leaders are born or made or is it an art and skill that you need to be a leader? In today's world it's all of the above because of the various professions we have. In each profession, we will need leaders who are born with the qualities or are made and have an art and skill to lead. However, there are some basic things that differentiate a leader from the rest and those are — the drive to lead, people who have the desire to achieve something in life and have the energy to be persistent and always show initiative.

People who have the will to take responsibility and have a strong desire to influence others by showing consistency between word and deed and by being truthful to the people he is about to lead or he is already leading. A leader should have self-confidence and should be intelligent to gather information, create visions, solve problems and make correct decisions. In depth knowledge allows leaders to make correct decisions and also to understand the implications of that decision.

So, now I ask you looking at the above qualities of a leader, do you think you are a true leader? Do you inspire others to dream, to learn, to do more, dream more and in turn become more. I think each and every one of us has been a leader in some point of our lives, among friends, among family, at work, depending on the situations we have faced. All of us have one, two or all of the above qualities and that's what makes us lead and become great leaders.

My friends, I urge you to be inspired and in turn inspire people to be excited about their lives or their missions and share your excitement so that others may do the same. Share your life experiences about your struggles, mistakes and life lessons and don't maintain the image of a perfect leader who has no doubts or struggles for we all know that all of us have been through struggles to become what or who we are today. To become a great leader you must focus on the goals and dreams of others and always get a feedback of your decisions. Help others to bring out the best in themselves.

> To become a great leader you must focus on the goals and dreams of others and always get a feedback of your decisions

A true leader always tries to build someone up and helps people to put their insecurities to sleep. Always encourage and remind people that they are worthy and magical and always be a light in a dim world. A true leader respects people, because the person who respect to others, shows that it is a reflection of his own personality. A true leader is always helpful and listens to the needs of others and offers the best solutions because of his/her knowledge and understanding.

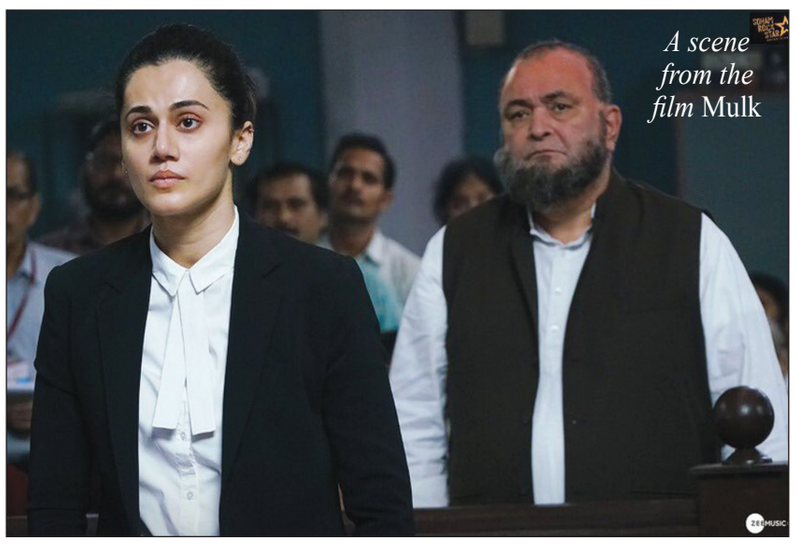
"Leadership today is about values, working with people, building consensus. It's about thinking about a greater good than you. It's not about the person on the white horse anymore."—Joanne Ciulla

Today, I encourage each and every one of you, reading this article to dream more, learn more, do more and become more so that you are able to inspire more and become true leaders and in turn show and teach others how to become true and great leaders.

(The author is a motivational speaker)

'India belongs to Muslims as much as to others'





Two years after the release of Pink, *actress* **Taapsee Pannu** *is returning to courtroom drama with Anubhav Sinha's* Mulk. *Portraying a character in the name of Aarti Mohammed, Taapsee features in the film as a lawyer.* **IBNS-TWF** *brings some of the lead actress' latest comments on the film and her character ahead of release:*

Tell me about the character you are playing in the film.
The character's name is Aarti Mohammed. The character seems to be interesting to me by the name only. She is a Hindu girl who gets married to a Muslim man. The story revolves around how Aarti fights for her in-laws and stands with the truth. Aarti is a girl to whom the right and wrong matters than anything else.

Your both glamarous and de-glamarous looks are quite going well at the box office. How do you feel about it?
First of all, I take it as a huge compliment that my both sides are working. I would like to see it like that. I love to be glammed up also at times but I do not get the opportunity. I thank God that people have appreciated me in the glamarous look as well, otherwise, I would have been hailed as actress only for de-glammed looks. Thankfully, its not like that. Now in certain films which is based on issues or characters, it is obvious that I can't put on makeups. It would be very weird if I enter the courtroom with make-ups and all.

What things have you learnt from the film?
I got to learn that I can hold my ground a little bit in front of such good actors. Prior to that my situation was tough, then I realised that I can do that as well. I am taking a lot of experience from the film. Hopefully I got one feather in my cap which everyone wants to wear. It will be a sweet memory.

Do you think the communal tension in the country increased after the right-wing (Bharatiya Janata Party) government was formed in India in 2014?
The issue is not about government but beyond that. It is a matter between two individuals. Rest whatever I want to say or I feel, has been illustrated in the film. I said dialogues in the film from my heart, so you will get the answer fully after the release of the film.

Was your decision to do the film personal?
Yes. One of the reasons was personal because after moving to Mumbai, I am surrounded by people- managing my day-to-day work- who belong to this community (Muslim community) and this beautiful country is as much theirs as ours. If I start doubting on them, then something wrong is taking place in my life or I am in the biggest situation of risk which I don't feel. I trust them and they are part of my lives.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, AUGUST 05, 2018***

Moon sextile Neptune on your solar return chart denotes a good year. You will get wonderful opportunities as far as your career is concerned. A positive and proactive attitude comes in handy when possibilities and new dimensions come up. This phase also bodes well for focusing on yourself and building on your strengths. Investment in property or assets will also be there. Home renovation plans could also get underway. Be careful when signing property and legal papers. You are at a special point in your relationship and could be ready to make long- term commitments and you could take your wedding vows. The health of a loved one would cause some worry.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



This period brings glamour in your life as you make changes in your grooming as well as in your lifestyle. You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You may feel a bit defeated by situations at home and at work. Allow space and time for things to change on their own. You maintain a fitness routine and a healthy diet program.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



The planetary configuration brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. This phase also highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. It's a favorable time to open up conversations with loved ones, as intimate moments are most appealing both of you. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your heart and head pull you in different direction when personal and family related decisions are to be taken. You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments and in your ability to socialize and make connections.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



There will be heightened communication, creativity and authority in your life. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating and learning is your best bet at this time. You spend time with your beloved and enjoy the quality time spent as well as the activities that you do together. You may redecorate your home, especially your living room, and add decorations to give a new look to your room. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel the part of whole, as this brings new opportunities and bring monetary gains. You have good team spirit and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers which in turn brings harmony at your work place.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You show strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the doors to new romantic relationships. Your head rules because you have been highly motivated to make more money and improve your financial status. Monetary transactions bring gains in property related issues. This is a favorable time for learning something new, feeling at ease in social situations, taking care of the details of daily life. You are brilliant at dealing effectively with difficult projects at work. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



This phase brings power, influence and authority. You turn things around in the business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Personal relationships may be dreamy and transitory and commitments are made and promises are honored. You would maintain balance in the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. Its right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professionals skills as a promotion or up-gradation in work area is likely to present itself. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There is a boost in your confidence as you handle conversations, seminars adroitly and express yourself more specifically about the subject. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering; you have to positively use your talents and efficiency. Be careful when expressing feelings and emotions others can misunderstand you. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner, and disputes with co-workers are possible. If you feel especially angry, frustrated or restless, it would be great to find little more work and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



There is a burst of good-luck in the sphere of love and romance. You spend great time and listen to the inner feelings of your loved one. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating with people and visiting friends and relatives. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor is especially strong. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasures, or romance during this expressive period. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You might just find that this is a period when you are at your most gracious-as long as you are truly listening instead of reacting. An overseas or long distance journey is on cards.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



You exhibit sensitivity in your relationships as you feel they are more important to you than many other things. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental and emotional with your loved ones. You may be especially focused on pleasing your beloved and may discover new facets to your love life. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. You may visit religious places and there are strong chances of pilgrimage. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

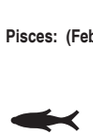


You build new associations and there are beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature this time. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

As the week brings more stability in relations and professional life; you have tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new approach to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and are especially fond of family life. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to be displaying a whole lot of self-discipline. You would work in association of senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



The ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. You or your parents may finalize a marriage proposal. Sharing your interests and communication with loved one may be especially appealing to you. You might spend a lot of time in meeting friends and loved ones. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Eat healthy food, yoga and meditation recommended would help to overcome from such problems.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You exhibit wisdom and knowledge in your behavior and cooperation and harmony in personal relationships. People are attracted to you for your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with important people in authority. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing problems in relations for some time. Centering within and witnessing inner truth and outer reflection is the best meditation this week. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Co-operate & flourish

By Ranjan K Baruah



A cooperative is "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise".

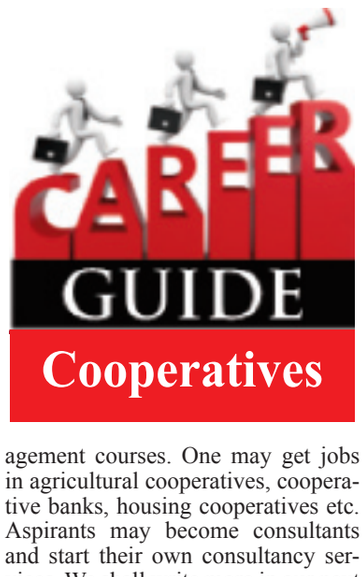
Cooperatives may include non-profit community organisations, businesses owned and managed by the people who use their services (a consumer cooperative), organisations managed by the people who work there (worker cooperatives), organisations managed by the people to whom they provide accommodation (housing cooperatives), hybrids such as workers' cooperatives that are also consumer cooperatives or credit unions, multi-stakeholder cooperatives such as those that bring together civil society and local actors to deliver community needs, second and third-tier cooperatives whose members are other cooperatives.

According to a research, in 2012 approximately one billion people in 96 countries had become members of at least one cooperative. One dictionary defines a cooperative as "a jointly owned enterprise engaging in the production or distribution of goods or supplying of services, operated by its members for their mutual benefit, typically organised by consumers or farmers".

Cooperative businesses are typically more economically resilient than many other forms of enterprises. Cooperatives frequently have social goals which they aim to accomplish by investing a proportion of trading profits back in their communities.

Co-operatives also foster external equality. As they are community-based, they are committed to the sustainable development of their communities — environmentally, socially and economically. This commitment can be seen in their support for community activities, local sourcing of supplies to benefit the local economy and in decision-making that considers the impact on their communities.

Students may take up courses like MBA in Cooperative Management or other diploma and certificate courses. Specialisations may be workers co-operatives, consumers' cooperative, etc. Students from any stream may join post graduate diploma or management courses. One may get jobs in agricultural cooperatives, cooperative banks, housing cooperatives etc. Aspirants may become consultants and start their own consultancy services. We shall write more in our next edition.



Updates:

Educational Crisis Scholarship: HDFC Educational Crisis Scholarship 2018 invites applications from students who are unable to bear the cost of education and are at a risk of dropping out due to a financial crisis. The key objective of the scholarship is to empower individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged. This scholarship is being offered by HDFC Bank under the Educational Crisis Scholarship Support (ECSS) programme. The students studying in Class 6 to 12 in government aided or private schools, students pursuing undergraduate or post-graduate (full-time or part-time) degree or diploma courses in colleges or universities recognized under AICTE/UGC/State/ Central government rules, the students whose family is facing an unfortunate event/crisis which has occurred in the preceding two years may apply for the scholarship. The application window is open from July 1 to August 15.

Scholarship from Government of Brazil: The Government of Brazil is offering full scholarships to Indian students under the Brazilian Exchange Program for Undergraduates Students (PEC-G) for the year 2019. The scholarships are being offered to promote the academic training and qualification to foreign students through free placement in undergraduate courses of Brazilian Higher Education Institution. Students may register and apply before August 31.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, and employability coach cum academic consultant and can be reach at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com)

"Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves."
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LX No.355 SHILLONG, MONDAY, AUGUST 6, 2018

Banking shocker

THE large bulk of bank account holders in this country comprises ordinary citizens. They are made to pay exorbitant banking charges via multiple and irresponsible ways. The revelation this past week that major banks have collected penalties totalling nearly Rs 5,000 crore during the 2017-18 fiscal for customers not maintaining the 'minimum balance' in their accounts is shocking, indeed. That shock has been amplified further by hints that this was done to also make up for the losses they incurred by way of bad loans – loans taken mostly by business sharks, who wilfully defaulted in repayments even as they have capacity to do so. Indian banking system is taking major hits in recent years due to the abject failure on the part of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to keep a close tab on their wayward style of sanctioning loans without ensuring sufficient guarantees for repayments. In several of these cases, pressure from ruling political classes including from the finance ministry had forced top banking functionaries to dilute the provisions for extension of such loans. Taking advantage of this season of permissiveness, banking officials themselves have mismanaged matters in ways to benefit their near and dear ones, or those who were willing to grease their palms. Instances are many, and cases of such mismanagement relating to banks like the public sector Punjab National Bank (PNB) as also the private sector Axis Bank and ICICI Bank are now common knowledge.

Banks now seem to be on a mission to rob the ordinary citizens by enforcing fines and service charges at excessive levels to make up for their omissions and commissions. Heavy charges in advancement of loans, unreasonably high service charges of other kinds, including on ATM withdrawals, and several other cuts off and on by banks on various counts are happening much to the distress of the customers. RBI is not doing its job of redressing the grievances of customers, though it admittedly had advised banks to reduce the rate of fines vis-à-vis failure to maintain 'minimum balance' in the accounts. Notably, complaints are also that the public sector banks including the lead bank, SBI are outwitting private banks in the matter of "fleecing" the customers. The NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not been of much help in streamlining the functioning of the banking sector. Scams involving the diamond merchant Nirav Modi have further dented the faith of the general public in the efficacy of banking institutions. Banking customers in India deserve a better deal.

Uprooting the tree to remove the disease

By H H Mohrmen

Much ink and paper has been spent debating the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018 but this piece will be different as the argument is on the fact that the Bill inadvertently pulls down the very foundation of being Khasi instead of protecting the indigenous community that the Council is mandated to protect.

The definition who is a Khasi is has been debated earlier but it needs to be reiterated that 'Khasi' is the name that others give us. There are variations in the spellings; some spell it Khasia, Khosia while others spell it Gossayah. Similarly the Pnars are called Synteng or Suteng perhaps from the fact that the Jaiñtia monarch was once upon a time called the 'ki syiem Sutnga' or the kingdom was also known as 'ka hima Sutnga' from Sutnga the place it originated.

What does it mean to be a Khasi-Pnar or Khun u Hynñiewtrep? It is the identity and it is something that makes us unique; it is something that defines us, or something that identifies us to others. The Bill infers that being Khasi is by virtue of blood or our bloodline and that is why it was proposed that the offspring of mixed marriages should be denied Scheduled Tribe status. The argument that a true Khasi is one who has pure blood does not hold water because of the very fact that there are intermarriages of both sexes with men and women from other communities and also "Tangjait" is one of the causes for the dilution of this idea of pure blood line.

But there are those who are of the opinion that our identity is based on our being a Jaidbynriew with a unique culture. It is considered to be a culture because of the custom and other unique features we follow that distinguish us and from others and which also defines us.

The clan system and the matrilineal system that we follow are the fundamental features of the Jaidbynriew. In fact clan and lineage are synonymous in the Khasi-Pnar tradition; they are like two sides of the same coin. And the next important aspect of the Khasi-Pnar in my order of priority are the three cardinal principles, 'ka kamai ïaka hok, (earn righteousness) ka tipbriew tipblei (know man and know God) and ka tipkur tipkha' (to know one's clan members and those of the father's clans) Tipkur tipkha is secondary because unless a person knows and lives in 'ka hok' and 'im tipbriew tipblei', chances of a person to 'tipkur tipkha' are very less. It is 'ka kamai ïa ka hok' and 'ka tipbriew tipblei' which guides the heart and the mind of a person in the Khasi-Pnar way of life.

The Megalithic culture that we see around us is another physical aspect of our culture. Our relationship with the nature and the indigenous knowledge and wisdom we learn from our ancestors are other points on the list. Then there are the folk stories, the indigenous food system that we eat, the songs, the dances, the festivals and the dresses we wear and even the indigenous religion that we have left behind are part of our identity.

Then there is another pertinent question that we are to ask ourselves. Are we still a tribe, a community or a society? We will leave the task of deciding our status to the experts, but one thing that is for sure is that we have all changed and evolved with time. And the two factors that help increase the pace of this change is the blitz of modern way of life and conversion from the indigenous religion to other faith groups.

I don't think I need to justify my first argument but the fact that conversion has only distanced us from our roots is there for all to see. Any scholar who wishes to understand the Khasi-Pnar way of life knows that, that information can only be collected from the areas where the predominant population comprise those who still follow the indigenous religion. We talk about the importance of the Clan among the Khasi-Pnar and the living example of this can be found only in the place where there are those who still follow the Niamtre (indigenous faith).

In Jowai the concept of "Ïung-blai or Kmai-ïung" is one such example which unites the families to the Kur. Niamtre was never an institution like the other faith groups and there is no church but instead of that the "Ïung-blai or Kmai-ïung" because religion/ faith is a family matter. All the rites of passages of the individual members of the family are conducted or performed at the "Ïung-blai" and the maternal uncle is the chief administrator of all the activities. Of course there are many "Kmai-ïung" in spite of the fact that there is one clan but the Kur are still related although they have different "Ïung-blai or Kmai-ïung".

In a family which does not follow Niamtre, there is no "Ïung-blai or Kmai-ïung" anymore; instead they now have what they call "Ïung-Kur" and it constitutes mainly families from one grandmother only while a Ïung-blai or Kmai-ïung comprises of families from different grandmothers or even great grandmothers. In the traditional Niamtre family the many families are united by the Ïung-blai to which they belong, while the unity of the modern families is very loose as they are not bound by religious rites and tradition and also the families tend to be nuclear families. Nevertheless clan is still a very important feature of the Jaidbynriew.

The Khasi-Pnars are therefore not homogenous anymore because our blood line is already diluted and there is no homogeneity in the very fundamental aspect of the Hynñiewtrep because we also follow different family systems. Regrettably the strong clan system on which the community is built is gradually eroding.

Marriage is the central and fundamental aspect of this Bill and again because it was constructed bases on the western idea, it contradicts with tradition (at least with the one followed in Jwai). Marriage in Niamtre is a contract between the two maternal uncles and the wedding ceremony is called "ka lam ïungtang" because it is the two maternal uncles which make a covenant (ïutang) on behalf of the couple and their respective families.

The different facets of the Khasi-Pnar culture like customs, the clan system, taking lineage from the mother and the cardinal principles etc are the bedrock of the Khasi-Pnar. But to consider the genuineness of a person based on a bloodline only, reduces the marriage to a contract between the couple and not a contract between the families led by the maternal uncle for which a traditional marriage is. The Bill therefore looks at marriage from a western context and ignores the traditional aspect of the institution.

The Bill is not only an attack on the traditional marriage system but it is an assault on the very fundamentals of the Jaidbynriew and that is the clan system. It is against the clan system because it considers marriage to be a contract between two persons and also ignores the important role of the maternal uncle. In one genius stroke the Bill does away with both the clan and the maternal uncle from being part of a very important institution of marriage. The Bill is therefore an attempt to save a matrilineal family system albeit by looking at the problem using patriarchal lenses.

If the Bill is allowed to be enacted into a law then gradually the family lineage system will change from matrilineal to patriarchal because blaming women for all the ills of the society was first propounded by the likes of Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai which proposed to do away with matrilineal family system. If we keep on blaming the transfer of tribal land to non tribal and the benami transaction on women we inadvertently fall into the trap of those who want to change the entire system from matrilineal to patriarchal. And if lineage system change then not only the entire structure will collapse under its own weight but the very identity that we struggle to protect and preserve will fade away.

In reminds me of an incident when we arranged a meeting of the Khasi mandarin farmers from Amlarem Block with the scientist of ICAR. We were only helping with the translation. The farmers and the scientist arrived at a conclusion that there are two diseases which attack the orchard, one is a bore which can be treated by closing the hole and using syringe to inject insecticide inside the tree trunk and for the parasite one needs to remove the part of the branches affected and burnt.

There are problems in the Jaidbynriew, no doubt about that, but this Bill is not the solution to any of the problems. The Bill rather than providing remedial measures to solve problems has instead uprooted the tree in its effort to remove the problem.

KHADC Issues: Another perspective

By Avner Pariat

I must say that I find Facebook a terrible thing. That is my opening remark. I think one could do a nice study about the incidence of its arrival and the polarisation of politics. There's a nice Ph.D topic for someone (though I think someone must have already done it by now). The reason I say this is because of the number of extremely offensive screen-shots which have been flying into my phone's photo folder over the course of the past week. All of them have originated from Facebook, and their targets have included Agnes Kharshiing, Angela Rangad and Patricia Mukhim. All women. Many of the male opponents of the KHADC bill have gotten off with a slight scolding or a stern berating. Isn't this indicative of something? It seems that men can debate all they want, but women who debate get called sluts, whores and traitors. Mind you I am sure these vociferous people wouldn't dare utter even a single word if they came face to face with any of these people. This is what Facebook has done. It has created little crevices for people to crawl into and there they breed amongst themselves. Everyone is now a "khraw-pyrkhat" (great thinker) and a Facebook "khlawait" (warrior). The algorithms written for Facebook ensure that these people always get an audience and it is always an approving one.

Personally I believe that if you are always getting praised, you must be doing something wrong. It might sound cynical but that is the world we live in today: sheltered, insular and instantly gratifying. So rather than preaching to a captive following, I would like to talk to the other side(s). I am sure they are not bad people, maybe our strains of reason are at odds but perhaps meeting each other can make us a bit more civil if nothing else. After all, how can a profile encapsulate a personality? I extend a hand to all detractors and opponents. My email is at the bottom, please contact me. If you have something to say, I'd like to hear it in person. Also kudos to T7 for broadcasting the debate on the KHADC bill, it was a wonderful step in trying to bridge the gaps created by platforms like Facebook. This shows us why local content is still so important in spite of the priority on "national" news. Because of that broadcast we, as a public, are better informed now and much more nuanced opinions are emerging from all sides. This is good news.

So on to the main course, this KHADC bill. What does one say about it that hasn't already been said before? The main issue here revolves around protection, i.e. the protection of the Khasi people from exploitation by outsiders. The opponents on the T7 broadcast threw different arguments at each other around this very topic. On one side you had the "our women are being exploited, our people are being exploited" argument to which the other side tried to offer different alternatives to the Bill. It was informative. I have a very simple premise for any law-making: whatever the case is, empirical facts are sacred. Emotions have no place in such procedures. That being said, is it a statistical fact that Khasi women are marrying non-tribal men by the droves? That can be found out through research into marriage records and so on. Now out of this set of inter-racial, inter-cultural unions how many are "exploitative"? Can we really find this out? It would be difficult but surely some attempt at it must be made if we propose to make laws upon the matter. What would the number be like? Would it be as high as the bill supporters hope for or would it be minuscule? And can we make laws if the case is the latter? These basic questions are left unanswered while the whole world burns down based on rumoured assumptions.

So the key to this whole argument about exploitation rests on the role of the women within these unions. Many people allege that non-tribal men seduce the apparently simple-minded and large-hearted tribal women and then fool them into allowing the use and abuse of their ST privileges. For example, if a business is registered under the Khasi wife's name, the non-tribal husband can escape the payment of any annual income tax. I am sure this has happened and is happening today, I do not deny that, and many people have offered (non-KHADC bill) solutions to this before. Obviously there must be a bevy of cases like this in order for people to take this issue to heart in the way they have. But here's where the argument often takes a sexist turn for the worse. It is assumed that the woman, 'being a woman', is a mere pawn in this war game between tribal and non-tribal man. That somehow she is helpless, and incapable of her own decisions, that she is the husband's puppet. I agree with this to an extent but I see this as something beyond a tribal versus non-tribal issue. The bigger question that emerges from this is: Are our women really as independent as we like to believe? Forget India and its uber-patriarchal societies, can our women compare favourably with the rest of the world in this regard? Are there many who are truly capable and emancipated? And are we ready to call them boss?

Many friends (and foes) from various pressure groups actively think that "ngi dei ban iada ia ki kynthei jong ngi" (we must protect our women) is a much more common slogan than "ngi dei ban pynhikai ia ki" (we must teach them). To the latter, I agree. Why not teach women (and men to be perfectly honest) how to manage money and resources better by themselves? Our women need to be re-skilled for the future, not shut out from it. In spite of the fact that women outperform men time and again in various lines of education, they are still shunned from being given real responsibilities. That is a crying shame. Many say women have too much power in our society, I want to antagonise by saying that they, in fact, need more of it!

People from all over the world have come to Meghalaya to research and inquire into our system. When the rest of the world is looking for alternatives to the rigid confines imposed by "patriliny" some here are thinking about ways to do away with it and have us join the "Mainstream". Matriliny is not at fault here. It is a system which is under extreme stress from external factors and in spite of this it is coping quite well if we are to be fair in our assessment. People say this system as we have it is unfair to men. But what we have today is not "matriliny" but a watered-down version of it. In the old days, the youngest daughter could not do anything without first consulting the uncles especially the eldest one. This is what "matriliny" meant to our forerunners. It places an emphasis on "kur" (clan) and clan encompasses everyone. Is there inequality in this? I am totally in favour of any bill that considers a way of strengthening and reinvigorating our ancient system.

Pnar model of assimilation No bill can substitute for our loss of community; we all raised children to become Khasis, we encouraged people to turn into Khasis

The writer can be reached at abner.pariah@gmail.com

TO THE EDITOR

Khasi society & the archaic Bill

Editor,

I read with great interest the article, "Unmasked: The Patriarchal Truth of Khasi Matriliny" By Dalariti Nongpiur & Philarisa Nongpiur (ST Aug 2, 2018) and I am so proud that two young women professionals could articulate their thoughts with such clarity. This particular sentence caught my attention, "It a sad thing that there is no law against hypocrisy, but for a community whose sense of self preservation is so deluded, we have an insatiable appetite for self destruction."This confirmed my own fears that the downward slide of Khasi society as a result of a depraved political culture is now laid at the doorstep of the matrilineal practice. Women are accused of mindlessly marrying some non-Khasi fortune hunter and allowing him to run away with the wealth from the state of Meghalaya. The arguments put forth by those 'men' who drafted the amendments to the 1997 Bill and those who impulsively supported it is that they are doing it to save the Khasi race from perdition. The word "Jaitbynriew" (the people) seems to stir up our basest instincts. I have been following the news on your online news portal and what I read shocks me because I see that those who oppose the proposed Bill are being caricatured as enemies of this "Jaitbynriew" as if they are already excluded from it and that therefore anyone is free to crucify them.

Is this the new low that Khasi society has sunk to and are people going to remain silent spectators with the exception of a few vocal ones like the two ladies who have written the above article? On Sunday I was surprised to read that the Seng Khasi had not tendered its views on the Bill because the Seng was not consulted. Isn't that a greater reason for opposing a Bill that has not taken the views of the indigenous faith group which has been the custodian of Khasi culture? Again, here I suspect that like other western faiths, our own too is led by men and decisions also are taken by them. I am sure that if the women in the Seng Khasi were consulted they would have their own views to share.

As a Khasi woman living abroad, I have always been proud of my society and believed that it is tolerant and liberal enough for women and men to feel safe to express their sexuality and their views too. But in recent times I have sensed the machismo that is suddenly becoming a predominant Khasi male psyche, during my occasional trips home. That coupled with the activism which is not based on empirical research of any kind is sure to lead the society into a regressive state even while other indigenous people are facing the world with courage and adapting to the changes but also engaging intelligently so that they do not lose out their land and resources to mining lobbies, to the timber mafia and the 'commons' to those with an eye on appropriating what is known in UN parlance as "Common Property Resources," which make indigenous peoples the owners of those resources.

I asked a few friends who I consider forward looking why they don't form a discussion group to logically thrash out this Bill. I was surprised to hear their reply. "The Bill has created such a polarisation in society that we don't want to add to that." This is the kind of argument that has pulled back Khasi society into the dark ages. And I personally consider this Bill extremely conservative and nasty too. I would encourage all the Khasi women who value their rights and their dignity to fight back whenever such societal disjuncture threatens to disrobe them of their matrilineal rights.

Yours etc.,
HJ Lyngdoh,
Camp: Ontario, Canada

Where is my fish?

Editor,

I have been spending these past few days in great anticipation. I was hoping to finally get to taste our own home grown 'fish' which were supposed to have been successfully reared under the famed aquaculture missions which our former CM created such a hype about. However with each passing day, I have realised that probably the aquaculture missions (and the millions which were spent on them) were so successful that perhaps Meghalaya is exporting them outside the State and that is the reason we don't get to see any local fish in the markets.

Kudos to the Government of Meghalaya for investing heavily in one successful mission after another!

Yours etc.,
Sumit Kar,
Shillong-1

Air India's patronage

Editor,

At the behest of the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of India, nationalized banks are reducing the rate of interest on hard-earned fixed deposits and Senior Citizen's Savings Scheme continuously every year. PPF & EPF are being exposed to Stock Market fluctuations. At the same time inflation based on wholesale prices has accelerated to a 4-year high of 5.77% in June, 2018 due to increasing prices of vegetables and fuel. The WPI based inflation stood at 4.43% in May and 0.90% in June last year as per government data released recently. Inflation is at the highest level since December, 2013, when it was at 5.9 per cent. As per the latest Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data, inflation in food articles stood at 1.80 per cent in June this year , as against 1.60 per cent in the previous month. Inflation in vegetables jumped to 8.12% in the last month.

Senior citizens who had contributed effectively and efficiently to the Industrial and over-all growth of the country's economy specially from the coal, steel other prime mineral production sector are not getting pension and fighting hard for survival. In a predominantly seller's market with exponential rise in prices of all essential commodities and with the shrinking and reduced purchasing/buying power senior citizens of the country have almost lost their right to live and right to medical aid and treatment.

Now Air India's decision of making available flight tickets to senior citizens of Indian nationality at half -price for inland travelling comes as a reprieve. It is expected that all other airlines too will take a cue from Air India and extend the same facilities to senior citizens.

Yours etc.
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Camp: Shillong

" Each state, so that it does not abridge the great fundamental rights belonging, under the Constitution, to all citizens, may grant or withhold such civil rights as it pleases; all that is required is that, in this respect, its laws shall be impartial. "

-- Lyman Trumbull

The Shillong Times

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Rule of law must prevail

THAT the primary duty of the state is to enforce the rule of law goes without saying. So what is this rule of law? Simply put, it means that laws apply equally to everyone in a democracy, even the most powerful government officials and elected leaders. It also means that laws are created through a predetermined, open, and transparent process and not by the whims of the most powerful members of society. Next to free and fair elections, one of the most important defining characteristics of democracy is the rule of law. While the citizens of a democracy choose their leaders and representatives through elections, the rule of law defines the relationship between representatives and citizens between elections.

Essentially, Democracy is a system of rule by laws, not individuals. This rule of law protects the rights of citizens, maintains order, and limits the power of government. All citizens are equal under the law. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of their race, religion, ethnic group, or gender. Hence the rule of law is at the heart of the relationship between society and the state. It is the basis for creating trust and accountability and forms the social contract between a government and its citizens.

To enforce the rule of law, the state has created a police organization and the judiciary. It is the duty of the police and other enforcement agencies to ensure that no one usurps the power vested on them by the state to carry out their responsibilities. Increasingly, in Meghalaya we are seeing this dilution of the rule of law. Non-state actors have time and again appropriated the role of the police. The recent setting up of check gates at various entry points to Meghalaya by a student body, ostensibly to put a brake on the spillover after the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in neighbouring Assam was released, is a case in point. This did not go down well with many genuine travelers who were subjected to this non-state policing which sets down its own rules of engagement. Those who had to traverse through Meghalaya to Silchar and beyond were harassed and the matter even came up in Parliament. This does not bode well for Meghalaya. This points to certain slackness in the application of the rule of law. While no one endorses a police state but the state too cannot outsource its responsibilities to sundry vigilante groups.

In the name of Jaitbynriew

By Toki Blah

The passing of the 2nd Amendment 2018 to the Khasi Custom of Lineage Act by the KHADC, hereafter referred to as the Bill, has managed nothing short of setting the cat amongst the pigeons. The uproar, the confusion and the hue and cry the Bill has managed to produce is to be seen to be believed. The Bill has managed, in one fell stroke, to expose the deep undercurrents that run beneath contemporary Khasi society. The surface has been scratched and the suspicions, misgivings and mistrust within our society have been laid bare. One of these relate to Khasi society's dislike and aversion to our women marrying outside the tribe; cohabiting with outsiders or bearing children out of such interracial marriages. This write-up has no intention of being judgemental on this point. It is simply stating facts as they prevail in our society today. There are those who protest against interracial marriages within Khasi society because they believe it defiles and contaminates the purity of Khasi Blood. Purity of Khasi blood has yet to be scientifically determined, if it ever would, so best to leave such claims to the realm of scientific fiction where they really belong.

There is however the strong belief, and not without reason, that due to our matrilineal system, our peculiar land holding system and reservations enjoyed by our people due to their Scheduled Tribe status, unscrupulous and devious outsiders exploiting the situation through wedlock with our indigenous women does take place. Suspicions also exist that some inter-racial marriages are simply to surreptitiously convert the tribal woman and her offspring to some other faith. We resent this and justifiably so but in the same breath cannot deny that there are non-tribal spouses who genuinely love their families; they take great care to raise their children in our tribal way of life; they take pains to integrate themselves into the Khasi way of life; they add to the advancement of our society. Children from such families, bearing their Khasi mother's name, have contributed greatly to the social and economic advancement of the Khasi Pnars. It has to be acknowledged. We cannot pretend this does not happen. The Good and the Bad exist side by side and it is not a singular phenomenon of this society and age alone. It has been there since time immemorial. There is evidence to show that our ancestors in their profound wisdom managed and handled their social problems with aplomb and elegant self confidence.

The same problems confront our society today. Question is, do we still have the socio political composure to handle such challenges?

Identity is important, so what is it that determines my identity? There is growing evidence based on DNA that perhaps the Khasis form one of the oldest communities on Earth. Some claim with a 50,000 year history to boot. The most distinguishing feature of Khasi identity, handed down through centuries of existence and recognised even by the Constitution and Supreme Court of this great country, is the matrilineal system of descent that my tribe follows. Khasis are unique because lineage is from the mother's side, irrespective of the father's race. The exclusive practice of 'tang jait' is an added feature to our identity. These are the exceptional features that make me a Khasi and without them I would simply be just another nondescript individual on this planet. Now suddenly these basic and fundamental traits that identity me and my tribe; this tradition and culture moulded and sculptured by the wisdom of my forefathers and handed down to me through the ages, is suddenly declared, in a one day sitting of the KHADC to be flawed, defective and dangerous to my wellbeing as a Khasi. A Khasi as a Scheduled Tribe identified by virtue of Art 342 (1) of the Constitution now stands a chance of being stripped of both Khasi identity and ST status by a bill of the KHADC. Is this legal? The 6th Schedule is not even an Article of the Constitution and it simply empowers the KHADC to make laws in relation to social customs only. It gives the KHADC no authority, no power and no jurisdiction to divest and disfranchise any Khasi of their identity as such or status as an ST. This has been reserved for Parliament under Art 342(11). For the KHADC to overstep its authority in this regard would tantamount to excessive legislation, is repugnant to law and attracts Para 12A of the schedule. The bill therefore is ultra vires to the provisions of the Constitution.

The arguments above in no way attempt to deny or sweep under the carpet , instances of exploitation of a woman's Khasi and ST status by unscrupulous non-Khasi spouses. We therefore have a problem. The Bill, in its wisdom, approaches the problem on the assumption that a Khasi woman is a conniving individual ever on the lookout for a wily non-Khasi husband, to swindle the tribe of its socio-economic and constitutional benefits. The Khasi woman together with her traditional ability to hand down lineage and property therefore has to be controlled, curbed and punished for her devious choice of life partners. Who is this abstract, theoretical, evil Khasi woman that the Bill so glibly proposes to contain? The truth is, in real life and not in its abstract form, this woman happens to be my and your own mother; our own daughters; our own sisters; our own spouses; our own nieces ; our own nah-nah and knia-kha. None with any vestige of evil in them. The truth is that the real Khasi woman is an integral part of the Khasi Jaitbynriew; as keen, as anxious; as committed as the next man to protect, promote and enhance the tribe in every way possible.

"There are those who protest against interracial marriages within Khasi society because they believe it defiles and contaminates the purity of Khasi Blood."

Evidence to the contrary shows that it is men, elected leaders, the ADCs composed of men (eg. Jaintia Hills and its cement plants) the syiems (eg. Iewduh), Rangbah Kurs, Rangbah shnongs who have time and again sold the Hynniewtrep tribe and its interests, to the outsider. A distressing reality most patriarchal mindsets refuse to acknowledge! We also refuse to research if in most cases of interracial marriages where abuse of ST privileges has occurred, the woman might have actually been duped, misled and hoodwinked by a scheming non-tribal husband. Has anyone cared to look at it from this perspective? The woman could be more of a victim rather than the willing co-conspirator to a crime. Unfortunately the hunch that she is a willing co- conspirator has resulted in the present Bill proposing to punish the victim. If we could only try to see her, our own flesh and blood, as a victim then perhaps we could come up with legislation that would offer better protection and safeguards against exploitation. This however calls for a mindset change. A puritanical and patriarchal mindset that seeks a solution through political brinkmanship is hardly the answer. A statesman like approach is called for that accepts both men and women as accountable and trustworthy members of the jaitbynriew. They need to merge together, in unison, as equals to protect, promote and uplift the community. Is the KHADC mentally equipped, prepared and ready to facilitate such progressive evolution of Hynniewtrep social customs? That is the real challenge.

In the end it is the 'kur' system that is the mainstay of our unique identity as Khasis. The 'kur' derives its composition from the practice of matriliny and tang jait. The 'kur' is composed of both men and women who play their respective defined roles in upholding the jaitbynriew. We need to ask ourselves what is it that really binds us together as a jaitbynriew? Is it party politics, traditional institutions, language, faith, belief systems, land holding pattern or what? It is the 'kur' (clan) system that we follow as a matrilineal society. That is the cement. Khasi identity revolves round the core institution of the 'kur'. Without the 'kur' there would be no Hynniewtrep people. Strengthening the institution of the 'kur' is the social custom KHADC needs to enact. It has the potential to protect us from what we fear. Attempts to divide the 'kur' into Khasi and non-Khasi members is not the answer. How do we protect the jaitbynriew by destroying the root of its identity? If Khasis today mill around in confusion and chaos especially in relation to the future of our destiny under the sun, the neglect and collapse of the 'kur' system, is the prime reason for this sad state of affairs. We need laws to empower the 'kur' system so that it delivers on the jaitbynriew's 21st Century needs. Use the 'kur' system to protect and preserve our unity. Coming up with KHADC chastity belts for our women is hardly the answer to the call for Khasi unity and empowerment.

(The author is President of ICARE)

'Business' of illegal migrants

Its time to bell the cat

By Poonam I Kaushish

In the summer of 1975, hundreds of thousands of people fled South Vietnam after Saigon's fall for fear of political persecution. They escaped in rickety and unseaworthy wooden boats. This was the largest mass exodus of asylum seekers by sea in modern history. Giving rise to the term "boat people". The world embraced them as refugees after a great deal of drama. The US which created the mess, led on the people it had walked out on. Canada, Britain, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan even tiny Bermuda followed.

Fourteen years later in 1989, the world changed its mind. The boat people had become an albatross round the neck. Worse, a new breed of boat people was taking to the seas: economic refugees. They were farmers, factory workers and labourers looking for a new life in new safe havens. They had no proof that they faced persecution if they returned.

In 2016, the world woke up to another set of boat people whereby over 22 million Syrians sought asylum in various parts of the world following six years of civil war. Of these 13.5 million required humanitarian assistance and another 5 million wanted refuge in European countries. One year later again the past repeated itself when 164,000 Rohingyas (Muslims) fled violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State and sought asylum in India and Bangladesh.

In India history seems to have come a full circle. Illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who had made Assam their home might no longer be able to stay put. Thanks to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) which has sifted through 3.29 crore people who had applied for recognition as Indian citizens, of these 2.89 crores made it to the second and final draft of the NRC while the fate of 40 lakhs hangs in the balance.

Kudos to the Government for taking the first step towards identifying and throwing out illegal migrants, which was a time bomb waiting to explode. Predictably, this has raised hackles of Opposition leaders with Bangla Chief Minister Mamata Bannerjee warning of a "bloodbath and civil war". Forgetting that the genesis of the problem started in 1951when East Pakistan immigrants settled in Assam due to the 4,096-km-long and porous India-Bangladesh border which made crossing easy.

Following the All Assam Students Union (AASU) agitation in 1985 then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi promised identification and deportation of illegal immigrants under the Assam Accord as it had significantly altered the region's demographic complexion, particularly in Assam's border districts, its six North-eastern sisters and Bangla with important political implications.

For over three decades the issue continued to be political fodder and finally in 2015 the Supreme Court directed the Government to update the NRC in a time-bound manner under the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules 2003. The process took off only in 2016 under the BJP Government which intends politically milking the issue and cornering the Congress and Trinamool's Chief by accusing them of indulging in minority appeasement.

Paradoxically, even as the 'secular' Parties swear by secularism, competition for the minority vote-bank has consistently communalised the issue. Most have recklessly imported them to inflate their vote-banks. Notwithstanding, the ugly reality that illegal migrants have completely changed Assam's demographic landscape, threatened livelihood and identity of indigenous people.

Think. Eight of Assam's 27 districts have a Muslim majority population and hold the key for 60 of 126 Assembly constituencies. Over 57 show more than 20% increase in voters, over 85% of the total encroached forest land is with Bangladeshis. According to intelligence reports, "In 70 years 1901-1971, Assam's population rose from 3.29 million to 14.6 million - a 343.77 % increase" over a period when India's population went up by only about 150%!

This, despite Assam's fertility rate being 126.5%, lower than the all-India rate of 137.3%, even as the Muslim growth rate in areas bordering Bangladesh was over 60% compared to faraway districts where the growth rate varied between 30-50% (1971-1991). Clearly, this unnatural growth is a byword for illegal migrants.

In Mizoram the anti-outsider feelings vents itself in frequent volatile student's stir. In Nagaland, the population of Muslims, mostly Bangladeshi illegal migrants has more than trebled in the past decade - rising from 20,000 in 1991 to over 75,000 in 2001. Tripura is a tragic example of obliteration of local identity.

Worse, seven districts of Bihar, Bangla and UP have been affected due to large-scale illegal migration. The Union Capital has over 12 lakhs and Maharashtra over 100,000 illegal Bangladeshis. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, Bangladeshis have even secured ration cards. From rag pickers to domestic help, agriculture workers to rickshaw-pullers all are mostly illegal migrants who take away jobs from citizens.

India is also home for over 150,000 Tibetan refugees, 70,000 Afghanis, 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils and 3.5 million Nepali refugees. With an ever burgeoning population bursting at the seams this spells disaster. Against 1.3 billion Indians the ratio of illegal migrants is 100 to 2.5 thereby putting colossal pressure on scarce resources, rising unemployment which is pushing wages lower.

"Undoubtedly, the influx from Bangladesh is more than an "aggression" and has "created a fear psychosis, made people's life wholly insecure and caused insurgency in alarming proportions," said a senior Home Ministry official.

Given the socio-economic complexities of our politics and society there should be a debate on their minority rights. As international migration scholar Myron Weiner says: Population flows across borders "do not merely happen. More often they are made to happen". Governments sometimes force immigration "as a means of achieving cultural homogeneity or for asserting the dominance of one ethnic community over another".

In fact, globally countries are realizing their open door policy to refugees was a grave mistake. German Chancellor Merkel is now regretting her decision, France is waking up to Islamisation by 2030, Denmark and Scandanavian countries are throwing them out. All realize it isn't merely demographic change and culture shock but with scarce resources, joblessness is on the rise resulting in increasing crime. US President Trump is making life hell for immigrants.

Where do we go from here? Pander to rabid rabble rousers? To politics of vote banks? Allow the Push and Pull theory of illegality to continue? The Push back to poverty vs the Pull of India's rich pastures. The option is narrow. ----INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Correction

In Avner Pariats's article : KHADC Issues: Another Perspective (ST Aug 6, 2018), the following footnotes 'Pnar model of assimilation,' and 'No bill can substitute for our loss of community; we all raised children to become Khasis, we encouraged people to turn into Khasis,' which are points he noted down to use in subsequent articles have inadvertently appeared in the article. The error is regretted. ***(Editor)***

Women ahead despite handicaps

Editor,

I must applaud the two Khasi men who wrote convincing pieces in the Shillong Times yesterday. Mr Mohrmen's authoritative article exposed the cultural contradictions in the KHADC Lineage Bill, while Avner Pariat's article was practical in its approach and called for wider dialogue, which was so lacking in the run up to the passage of this Bill which violates human rights and the Constitution.

Labour workforce participation rates in the 2011 Census shows that males in Meghalaya lag behind the Indian average while females score at 10 percentage points above the national average, standing third in the country. This is despite inexcusable social and health indices, unlike their sisters in Himachal and Sikkim, states which have very high gender indices, unlike their deprived sisters in Meghalaya.

Meghalaya has the highest fertility and birth rates in the country and the lowest use of contraceptives. This depletes the health of women and is demonstrated in a high maternal mortality rates and high prevalence of malnutrition in the children, among the highest in the country. Is it not men who are the main cause of these woeful statistics? On top of this, women in Meghalaya suffer the highest rate of abandonment in the country. In no other state do so many women have to shoulder the burdens of bringing up children as a single parent.

In spite of these handicaps, women have shown bold and brave determination and entrepreneurship as we see daily in the tea shops, pavement vendors and other enterprises. A much quoted study from the University of Chicago shows that women in matrilineal societies are more industrious and risk-takers compared to patriarchal communities.The study specifically looked at the Masai (in Africa) and Khasi tribes. Surely this is a matter of cultural pride for Khasis.

I commend the Shillong Times for the space given to debate on this important issue. However, we see hardly any contributions in favour of the Bill. Not much by way of cogent arguments or data-based research has come from supporters of the Bill. In the end this is just another attempt at patriarchal subjugation of women.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C Kharkongor,
Via email

Take time to discover root causes

Editor,

According to research, stereotypical thinking, ignorance, and selfishness are the three main causes of racism. Stereotypical thinking stems from prejudice. The word "prejudice" , is defined as wrong belief. Opinion has a potential to turn into an attitude. When we have a "sustained" attitude, it converts into belief. People naturally entertain more than 10,000 thoughts in a day. We harbour negative and positive thoughts. Interestingly we give high priority to negative thoughts. Ignorance is the second cause of racism. Thirdly, selfishness could also be reckoned as a root cause of racism. This implies that there are people who have egoistic or self-centered attitudes. In short, they do not care about others as long as they gain whatever they need. The big question that arises then is, "What do we do when we have a problem?" Do we jump straight in and treat the symptoms, or do we stop to consider whether there's actually a deeper problem that needs our attention? If we only fix the symptoms - what we see on the surface, the problem will almost certainly return, and will need fixing over, and over again. However, if we really look deeper to figure out what's causing the problem then we can go ahead and try to fix the things that are really wrong beneath the surface so that they go away for good.

There are five things that we seriously need to consider. We first need to define the problem. The second step would be to see how long the problem has existed and how it has impacted society. Thirdly let us try to identify possible causes and the events that have really led to this problem. Finally we should try to identify the root cause. Once we have identified the root cause, then only we should move ahead and try to implement a solution that will fix the problem once and for all.

We can only hope that our lawmakers would have carefully taken all of these factors into consideration before jumping in and bringing in any new law that might further weaken ,divide and destroy our society instead of strengthening, building and consolidating what has already been built. What we need are more servants and not saviours.

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri
Shillong-2

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

"Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written."

--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.357 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2018

Congress gears up

THE Congress is gearing up for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls to take on the ruling BJP. It is trying to form an alliance with anti-BJP parties across the country. Victories in by-polls in UP through its strategy of alliances has shown the way. The Congress, SP and BSP have reached a strategic understanding to fight the elections next year. Details of seat sharing are being worked out. The Party has however ruled out an alliance with the Shiv Sena which is not ideologically aligned with the Congress. The Congress is in direct fight with the AAP in Delhi and the TRS in Telengana. The Congress High Command does not overrule the views of state units. West Bengal is a grey area. The state Congress is at odds with the TMC but Mamata Banerjee met Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in Delhi and there is no ideological clash between the two parties. Mamata Banerjee's equation with Sonia Gandhi has always been good. Banerjee has already teamed up with Omar Abdullah of the National Conference in Kashmir. The Congress feels that discussing a post-poll scenario is counter-productive.

About the Assembly Polls in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, the Congress will not project a Chief Ministerial face. In Maharashtra, the Congress-NCP alliance is going strong. The Congress demands a free and fair election and a decision on the EVMs will be taken in consultation with the party's electoral allies. All depends on the Election Commission. But pre-poll alliances have been known to be fraught with inconsistencies about which party will file how many candidates from where. These often are the sticky points which ultimately push wannabe candidates who are told to make way for a candidate agreed to by the Alliance (maha-gatbandhan) to contest as Independents or join some other non-aligned party and throw the spanner in the works. Besides there are too many prime ministerial contenders. The Congress has already projected Rahul Gandhi as its prime ministerial candidate. The TMC believes only Mamata fits the Bill while the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is all for Mayawati occupying the Delhi throne. This is where the BJP with its single PM candidate is likely to score better. Past experiences of pre or post poll alliances have not stood India in good stead.

LOOKING BACK

May 29, 1989

Congress(I) strategy to win back rural base

The AICC(I) one-day session on May 10 at Siri Fort Stadium was an occasion for the ruling party to fire yet another election year salvo, when it enjoined upon the Central Government to bring forward a Constitution amendment in order to give "teeth" to the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) in the country.

The AICC(I) adopted the longest ever, 11-page, resolution on the Panchayati Raj system, that being the only subject slated for discussion at the session. The resolution was adopted unanimously. All amendments were withdrawn without any demur after the Congress(I) President, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, requested the movers to do so.

Most speakers hailed the resolution to be the third "unique" initiative taken by Mr Rajiv Gandhi to transform Indian polity in the last few months since the previous AICC session in November last year. The other two initiative mentioned were lowering of the voting age, bringing another 50 million youth into the voters' list, followed by the Rs 2100 crore Jawahar Rozgar Yojana.

Speaker at the Sri Fort Stadium described the AICC (I) session as "historic", for the proposed Constitution amendment, it was claimed, would involve millions at the grass-roots in running their own affairs through regularly elected Panchayti Raj bodies. Mr Rajiv Gandhi's claim was, that once the new PRI system runs into steam, it would eliminate alienation of the vast rural population and thus also help "fight corruption" as also "powerbrokers" who thrived on the alienation between policy-makers and the people at the grass-roots.

For those who have been witnessing Congress sessions, including AICC(I) sessions under Mr Rajiv Gandhi's dispensation there has never been such a meek Congress gathering as the one at Siri Fort. A handful of youth belonging to the NSUI occasionally shouted slogans, some times for no rhyme or reason, providing a contrast with the subdued audience, for few in the stadium responded to these slogans. After all, it was an AICC(I) session and not a street-play, but the thrust was all too clear. As a result, none dared to advise the youth to exercise restraint needed among participants in the highest Congress policy-making body, the AICC(I).

Khasi Social Custom of Lineage (Second Amendment) Bill: Are we willing for a real change?

By Dr. Lakhan Kma

A lot has been said about the recent Khasi Social Custom of Lineage (Second Amendment) bill passed by KHADC which was sent to hon'ble Governor who sent it back to State government for review. As expected, there are arguments both for and against the said bill. One can't help but think the bill is a reflection of lack of farsightedness on the part of KHADCand its divisive intent.

Personally, I would have like to see the KHADC not touching the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, 1997 at all or have the guts to make amendments by taking bold, out of the box thinking, keeping the reality of Khasi society in mind in the current times. Marriage is supposed to be a choice of individuals which is considered a sacred and private affair solemnized by authorities who do it in the holiest name of God. If we believe that matches are made in heaven and we continue to believe in destiny (like we say 'thaw shyieng krung'), I see no role of KHADC in between this.

Imagine a hypothetical scenario where a Khasi lady- the only girl child of her parents, at her mid 30's or early, 40'somehow could not get a life partner and one fine day comes across a nice man from Assam, Bengal, Andhra, Maharashtra, Kerala, etc. or abroad, and eventuality enters into a holy matrimony with her. Consequently, the woman gets her children to continue her clan. Would the woman or her family consider it a blessing or would the KHADC step in to punish her or her off-springs? There could be another scenario where a Khasi woman's husband turns rogue with no earnings or character, indulges in physical or verbal abuse on regular basis to the extent that she loses the confidence in Khasi men and turns to a non-Khasi man who provides the care, comfort and love she deserves. Would it be appropriate for KHADC to step in and say hey! wait till you find a next nice Khasi man otherwise we will punish you and your upcoming child by stripping your rights as a Khasi ST and we will guarantee that you get one before you run out of time?

These are the situations that are more realistic than hypothetical when we look around our neighbourhood. As 'the jaitbynriew' or community, we have to face these questions head-on. Marriage is a private affair between two individuals or families. If KHADC was not involved in your upbringing, education, hardships, employment, etc. they have no business to decide whom you should marry. Looking at this amendment bill in its present form, very soon the KHADC will have to open a 'Khasi matrimony department' for match-making.

Instead of curtailing the rights of Khasi women, I would have expected KHADC to focus on the upliftment of Khasi men to bring them at par with Khasi women in sync with the Right to Equality as granted in our Constitution. In this endeavour, the KHADC should do away with the ritual of 'Tang Jait' which is archaic and irrelevant to a large section of Khasi society and particularly biased towards Khasi men. If a Khasi man marries a non-Khasi, he should be allowed to pass on his surname to his off-springs. The decision of inheritance of clan name should rest with the 'Seng Kur' in accordance with Khasi way of life. I have several encounters with scenario where empowering men can save and shape precious life. Let me cite an extreme example. A poor young couple had children between 1.5, 3 and 4.5 years old. After a brief illness, the wife died and within a month or two, the father moved out to another woman leaving the young kids to be looked after by the maternal relatives to suffer, simply because they did not belong to his clan. Without generalizing anything, this is also the reality of our society and I don't want to shy away from it. While our matrilineal society does give advantage to our women, at times it has also been partial to men and many a times being exploited by some selfish men. Had there been a choice to pass on the father's clan to his off-springs, as and when needed, the kids would not have suffered in the example that I just cited above. My heart burns when I see those kids. If there were provisions in the amended lineage bill, it would have been binding on the father to pass on his clan to his children, duly approved by the Seng Kur and nurture the kids for a brighter future instead of deserting them to starve and suffer. Empowering the Khasi men would add more responsibility and it will also serve as a check and balance between Khasi men and women while enjoying equal rights.

The other change that could have been brought in the amended bill is the removal of the concept of 'Khatduh or 'youngest daughter' as the custodian of ancestral property'. While appreciating the genesis of it in the olden times, it has become increasingly untenable in modern times and has been a subject of exploitation, although things are different among Pnars and Wars. Of course, many parents now are distributing the ancestral property among the siblings out of their free will; the codification of the practice will further strengthen it. With the will of the parents, I am sure the youngest daughter would not mind sharing the ancestral property with her siblings. It will also become the duty of every sibling to take care of their parents because with rights also come responsibilities. It will also perhaps, satisfy those who believe that non-Khasi men marry Khasi women, particularly the youngest one, only for facilities. Knowing fully that his would-be wife has to share the ancestral property will all her siblings, his decision will be guided by his wisdom. It will also prevent the exploitation of the Khatduh by her selfish husband by trying to take control of everything in absence of support, check and balances from the other siblings and relatives.

One has to keep in mind that a small tribe like ours has to stay united under all circumstances. Our society is vibrant and progressive. While we continue to cherish our matrilineal system, it has to be inclusive based on different scenarios/ situations. Shaming and blaming a part of society will not lead us anywhere and would instead breed division among the 'jaitbynriew'. We have very happily adopted changes with time. I am dead against those 'sons who preach' culture and tradition without understanding it. If not for our ability to accept what we think are better choices, all of us would have been affiliated to only Niam Khasi or Niamtre and would have officially celebrated the holidays only on Shad Suk Mysiem, Beh Deinkhlam, Shad Nongkrem or Seng Kut Snem, etc. If not for changes that we have consciously embraced, there would not have been Christian Khasis, Muslim Khasis or Hindu Khasis, etc., because all these religions are originally foreign to Khasis and were not part of our original faith, culture or tradition. Being a progressive community, we happily and willingly accepted the changes for good and should continue to do so. KHADC can't expect a Khasi man/woman who goes outside the state for studies or jobs to come back only to marry a Khasi for fear of losing his/her ST status although they may be equally concerned for their beloved motherland as those residing in Khasi Hills.

While KHADC is expected to take stringent measures to curb exploitation of the Khasi community or its resources, its action should be mindful, farsighted and inclusive so that all members of the community continue to thrive well. As it is amply clear, the decisions of KHADC in the past is responsible for some grave blunders that continue to haunt the community till date. It has to stop adding more blunders to its kitty. May God grant wisdom and courage to KHADC so that it can play its role to protect the jaitbynriew in the true sense and with all fairness. Everybody would like to see KHADC playing its constructive, stringent implementation and monitoring role for the community without succumbing to divisive pressure, ego, vindictiveness or lure of money, true to the cause of its creation under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of our country.

TO THE EDITOR

Taliban type Bill

Editor,

Apropos to the letter captioned, 'Hitler's Bill" (ST Aug 1, 2018) I am thankful to the author for his valuable points on the Khasi Lineage Bill and to further add that to that, the idea behind the Bill is to take our society from civilization to the jungle. The Bill is derived from the ideology of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The intention of the CEM of the KHADC is to divide and destroy the Khasi society, as I do not see the Bill bringing any benefit to the Khasi society. In the debate held recently on the subject matter the representative of the Seng Khasi stressed the need to consult various clans and other stake-holders and discuss on the pros and cons of the Bill before passing it in the KHADC, which is a valid point to be noted.

If the concerned clans do not have any objection against the mixed marriages why should the KHADC poke its nose on the matter? The anti- Benami Law is in place to protect the economic interest of the Khasis. That in itself is sufficient to protect them and we blame the KHADC for not implementing the existing laws. The attitude and language of the present CEM of the KHADC of late appears to be highly arrogant and not less to that of a dictator. I do not believe all the MDCs are of the same view in favour of the Bill, unless they are being lured/ bullied/ blackmailed by the CEM and we should not allow a group of 30 MDCs under undue influence of the arrogant HS Shylla to decide on the lives and future of 10 lakh people.

I would also inform the readers that under the behest of Mr HS Shylla himself, for his personal interest, a group of women called STIEH was formed to support the Taliban Bill. I appeal to all right thinking citizens to oppose the Bill tooth and nail and to prevent it from being enacted.

Yours etc.,
Markordor Shangpliang
Shillong -14

Is it a Personal Lineage Bill?

Editor,

Apropos the news item in your paper, "Shylla meets Tynsong; Lashes out at activists" (ST July 31, 2018) I would like to say that the CEM has revealed his immaturity and irrational state of mind by deciding to implement the Khasi Lineage Bill, come what may, even without getting the assent of the Governor, which is mandatory under the law. He went further stating that he is ready to secede from India if the Bill is not approved, which confirms his unsound mind. Further, by making personal attacks against those opposing the Bill, it shows that he is not in a position to withstand criticism and to see reason. His statement reveals that he is taking personal interest in the Bill to upstage his rivals.

Therefore, let the readers and the public in general take note of the intention of the Bill as Mr Shylla has ulterior motives in moving the unsound bill. I appeal to all MDCs to rethink and to recall the Bill and consign it to the dustbin otherwise the electors will throw them out in the 2019 MDC elections. The state government should use its wisdom and power not to allow the Bill to be enacted as it will cause more damage than solving the issues of the Khasi society.

Yours etc.,
TS Byrsat,
Shillong -8

Citizenship entails duties too

Editor,

After the publication of the final draft of NRC in Assam, a lot of furore has been created by our politicians all over India and particularly in Assam as to who actually is a citizen of India. About 40 lakh people could not find their names in the final list! We ordinary people who are privileged to call ourselves Indians and assume citizenship as our birth right or ancestral property should ponder upon whether we actually deserve this privilege? We talk about enjoying our Fundamental Rights but seldom remember that the Constitution also enjoins Fundamental Duties to be exercised by each citizen. In modern democracies like India, only those people, apart from the sick, the invalid, the old and minor, deserve to be called citizens, who have a meaningful contribution to the nation's socio-economic well being. And the likes of Mallyas, Choksis, criminals and corrupt politicians, at best deserve to be called mere inhabitants and stripped of all their privileges as 'Citizens of India'

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H. Laskar,
Guwahati.

Time to turn into party animals

Govt policies being used to polarise people

By Sushil Kutty

Guess governments start to get more and more influenced by the party that forms the government as general elections approach. Witness the BJP-led Modi government. It has become more party-focused than country-concerned these last several months.

The impression gaining ground is that the party's base is dictating the government's behaviour. Like in the appointments of Supreme Court judges. Ideally, the government should not be seen playing politics in such serious endeavours. But the way the government has treated Justice KM Joseph's appointment is downright petty if not mean.

The Supreme Court collegium cleared Justice Joseph's name in January. "While recommending the name of Mr Justice KM Joseph, the collegium has taken into consideration combined seniority on all-India basis of Chief Justices and senior puisine Judges of High Courts, apart from their merit and integrity," the collegium wrote.

What did the government do? It sat on the appointment for four months. Then it sent back his file for "reconsideration", stating that he was "not senior enough"; and that having two judges from Kerala in the apex court would be against the principles of regional representation. If the first reason was petty, the second was ingloriously mean!

In July 2018, the collegium "reconsidered" and "considered" it proper to once again recommend Justice KM Joseph's name. Now, the government had no excuse to deny him his due. So, it played dirty in a different manner. In an August 3 notification clearing Justice KM Joseph's name, the names of two other justices - Justices Indira Banerjee and Vineet Saran - were listed above him.

It was a sleight of 'intention'. The collegium had recommended Justice KM Joseph's name first. But it ended up last in the list of three, effectively rendering him "junior" to the other two. Accepted Supreme Court tradition is that seniority is set by who takes oath before whom? And the order of names on a list decides who will take oath first, second and…

Other Supreme Court judges and the collegium were not amused. They discussed it among themselves and have reportedly decided to take up the matter with the Chief Justice of India, ask him to "remedy the situation." Will that work? Any such move will erupt on twitter and BJP trolls will have a field day. Justice KM Joseph's religion will be mentioned. It will be one big brouhaha followed by a bigger hoo-ha!

Remember what happened to Sushma Swaraj? She was set upon by every so-called "bhakt" in town and millions out of town. Foul-mouthed by people who have given vigilantism an entirely new connotation. And the BJP top brass is scared #@*% of this huge amorphous and heartless horde possessed with a herd mentality that invades crappy lanes and by-lanes.

An estimated 31% of the electorate voted BJP to power in 2014. In the four years since, the party has won several states. Means more of the electorate voted B JP. Must be because the Modi government saw to it that nothing was done to upset the party's Hindutva base. The feeling is that polarization is working favourably for the BJP.

So, every attempt should be made to polarize. Every avenue explored. Cow protection. Cow vigilantism. Physically targeting opponents. Holding up appointments of judges perceived to be anti-BJP. All these will fire up the party's hardcore Hindutva base. Rahul Gandhi's 'Soft Hindutva' should not be allowed to build momentum. So, give the sentiment 'India for Hindus' a leg-up? Boost. Bournvita. Complan. Oats with cow's milk. Daliya!

BJP youth wing cadre from the BJYM and ABVP caught hold of him and left him nearly senseless, clothes torn and dignity lost. In the 15 days since, no investigation has been conducted. No arrests made. A tent falls at a Modi rally in West Bengal and everybody standing including policemen are questioned. But Swami Agnivesh gets punched and dragged and nobody even drunk is suspected. It beats logic. But it should not. With D-Day 2019 approaching, Modi and Shah are gearing up for the big imperative push. Many of the promises made are yet to be fulfilled.

Other recent signs also show that that the government is hostage to the party's overarching goals. For instance, the treatment meted out to Swami Agnivesh in BJP-ruled Jharkhand. Cornered and beaten, the social activist, his turban snatched away, looked like a complete total stranger!

BJP youth wing cadre from the BJYM and ABVP caught hold of him and left him nearly senseless, clothes torn and dignity lost. In the 15 days since, no investigation has been conducted. No arrests made. A tent falls at a Modi rally in West Bengal and everybody standing including policemen are questioned. But Swami Agnivesh gets punched and dragged and nobody even drunk is suspected.

It beats logic. But it should not. With D-Day 2019 approaching, Modi and Shah are gearing up for the big imperative push. Many of the promises made are yet to be fulfilled. So-called Lutyen's Media is getting bolder by the day. It was 'Okay' so long as it was the Angrezi media. But if the Hindiwala media is getting out of hand, it's a warning.

Opposition moves to form a grand alliance shook up the establishment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants another term to "transform India". Amit Shah has to keep the cadre/base fired up to deliver Modi a second term. And for that, even the government has to cooperate, fall in line. (IPA Service)

" A grateful heart is a beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being. "

-- James E. Faust

The Shillong Times

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Exit Karunanidhi

Tamil Nadu is in a state of shock. The demise of Muthuvel Karunanidhi on Tuesday at the age of 94 sent tremors down to every nook and corner of the state. He was such a reigning presence for more than half a century in the state politics. But, that shock was only amplified by the last punch that the rival AIADMK and its chief minister sought to inflict on the veteran leader who rode like a colossus on the essentially pro-Dravidian political scene. By refusing to grant a space on Marina Beach to bury the body, a favour that was extended to other top leaders in the state in the past, the Palaniswami government has only proven its penchant for dirty politics even in such a sad situation.

Tamil Nadu has been passing through difficult and politically volatile times after the demise of another legendary leader J Jayalalithaa in December 2016. She, like Karunanidhi, had reigned supreme in state politics for decades. Her political establishment, the AIADMK, is now facing challenges and the governance of the state by a new generation of AIADMK leaders leaves much to be desired. Some of them are steeped in corruption. The DMK, spearheaded by Karunanidhi and later by his son, too is under a cloud vis-a-vis corruption of a high order as in the 2G scam and several other deals. However, the two parties that alternated in power in the state since the 1960s also helped in pushing growth. That ear of growth is now arrested, thanks largely to the uncouth behavior, greed, lack of maturity and lack of vision of the new generation leaders. This is amply proven by the reckless actions of CM Palanisamy and his flock as in the denial of permission to bury Karunanidhi on Marina Beach - a decision that the Madras High Court has reversed.

The pro-Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu might retain its strength for some time, if only because of the strong foundations built by Karunanidhi, or former CMs like MG Ramachandran or Annadurai, over the years. National parties have little relevance there, and both the Congress and the BJP are playing minor roles in the state. The trust of the people in the AIADMK, in particular, is on the wane ever since the demise of Jayalalitha. The party is split into parts, and there is no central figure that it could bank on now. The DMK, under MK Stalin, might still survive odds, if present trends are any indication.

The Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill of 2018 & Survival of the Indigenous Faith in Meghalaya

By Sumarbin Umdor

The Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill of 2018 that was passed recently by KHADC has been presented by its supporters as a legislation that seeks to prevent the economic exploitation of the state's land and its resources by unscrupulous non-Khasi men that are married to Khasi women. There has been much debate about the ramifications of the action by KHADC. In this column, we look at one such unintended implication of the Bill that may have far reaching consequences for the Khasi community in general and on the followers of the Khasi Indigenous faith in particular.

A newspaper item that reported about the purported division among the senior leadership of the Seng Khasi Body with regards to the Bill piqued my interest in trying to understand the likely implications of the Bill for this religious minority group that still practice the indigenous faith followed by the Khasi community before the advent of Christianity in these hills. For this, I looked up at the census on religious community in the state including the age wise data to better appreciate the likely impact of this Bill on young Khasi women and their ability to practice and follow the religion of their ancestors. As the title suggests, my position on the repercussions of the Bill is that, if enacted and implemented it will adversely affect the followers of the Khasi Indigenous faith, a conclusion I draw based on hard numbers; and they say numbers don't lie.

In Meghalaya the percentage of people following Khasi indigenous faith and other indigenous religions and minor faiths categorised in the census as 'Other religion and persuasions' has come down by 8 percentage points from 17 percent to 9 percent from 1991 to 2011. In fact, the state had more people practising the local indigenous religion in 1991 compared to 2011, which is not so in the case of the six dominant faiths namely Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. In these two decades the number of Christians in Meghalaya has steadily increased from 65 to 75 per cent. Even followers of Jainism in the state had more followers in 2011 compared to 1991. Since the Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill of 2018 is only applicable to the Khasi people of Meghalaya claiming ST status,we focus our attention specifically on this group and more specifically on Khasis belonging to the Khasi Indigenous faith.

In 2011 the ST population in the state was about 26 lakh with the Khasi population- comprising of Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi and Lyngngam- constituting the major tribe with a population of about 14.12 lakh representing 55 per cent of ST population of the state (or about 48 per cent of state's total population). Census reveals that majority of the above ST Khasi population are Christians (about 11.74 lakh or 83 per cent) followed by 'Other religions and persuasions' (2.2 lakh or 15.4 per cent).

" The Bill would also affect Khasi Christian women in the same way it does to her fellow tribes-women following the Indigenous faith."

One may note that in Meghalaya 'Other religions and persuasions comprise mainly of the Seng Khasi and Naimtre(being the dominant local religious groups of about 2 lakh population) followed by the Sonsarek of the Garos and about 23 other local and minor religious faiths.

Now let's look at the population of young Khasi women within the two main religious groups in Meghalaya. About 30 percent of the state population is within 18 to 35 years, which means that there are about sixty thousand young Khasi men and women in the Khasi Indigenous religion and 3.5 lakh young Khasi Christians. If we assume that 50 percent of them are married or have settled down, then we have thirty thousandand 1.75 lakh eligible young Khasi men and women in these two religions respectively. Since the Bill does not affect or curtail the freedom of men to choose their wives from outside the community, we concentrate only on the women and how the Bill would constrain and influence her decision in choosing her life partner from outside her religion.

The statistics quoted above show how the situation is stacked against young women belonging to the Khasi indigenous religion in as far as her freedom to choose a compatible life partner belonging to the same religious background is concerned. First and foremost, considering that the sex ratio among the ST population in the state is favourable to women (1013 female to 1000 men), there are more young eligible women as compared to men. Secondly, marriage in the Khasi community is regulated by certain social taboos that prohibit marriage within one's clan. This further limits the choice of a suitable partner that a young Khasi woman practicing the faith of her ancestors can choose from within her own religious group.

If we now introduce other considerations such as traits that women generally look for in a life partner such as mutual attraction, education background, financial status (psychologists and sociologists have listed many more traits that attracts opposite sexes to each other and how these are changing over time), then the prospects of many of these young Khasi women of finding a suitable match from within their own indigenous faith further diminishes. What makes the task of finding a partner even harder is the unorganised nature of the marriage market (a term introduced by Gary Becker who won the Nobel prize in Economics in 1992)among the tribals. The search for a suitable life partner among the non-tribals is an organised affair involving parents, friends and relatives aided by technology and matrimonial websites which ensures a higher success of finding a suitable match. No such arrangements exist among the tribals.

In the present situation, Khasi women of Indigenous faith can opt for a Khasi partner from outside her religion or a non-Khasi partner without compromising on her official Khasi status and those of her future off-springs. However, should the Bill become a law then this situation changes. In the second case, if she chooses a partner from outside the Khasi community she loses her official status, which also affects all Khasi women irrespective of the religious affiliation. But what would happen should she choose a Khasi Christian partner, a group which holds the largest available pool of men of her own tribe, which therefore increases the probability of finding a suitable partner of the desired qualities other than religion?

There has always been intermarriage between the young people of these two religions with one of the spouses converting to the other's religion or both choosing to maintain their own religion as per mutual agreement. With the enactment of the Bill, the pressure on a Khasi woman belonging to the Indigenous faith who chooses to marry a Khasi Christian man to convert to the religion of her partner will be much more and her power in such negotiation greatly diminished as her dependence on this pool of eligible Khasi partners would have now increased as marrying someone outside the tribe would lead to the loss of official ST status. Such conversions would only increase the pace of decline in the numbers of followers of the Indigenous religion among the Khasis.

The Bill would also affect Khasi Christian women in the same way it does to her fellow tribes-women following the Indigenous faith. The only advantage for the former is that given the much larger pool of eligible Khasi Christian men, the chances of finding a suitable match within the community is much brighter.

In this situation, we may find that many of our young women, followers of Christianity and Indigenous faith alike, who are unable to find a suitable match within their own religion or who are not ready to convert to another religion nor willing to forgo their official tribal status by marrying someone outside the tribe would opt to stay single. Given the minuscule size of the Khasi tribe, this situation would have an adverse impact on the long term growth of the Khasi population.

Understanding My KhasiNess

By Jerry Lucius Pyrtuh

The second amendment of the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage bill came with a force that destabilised the "Khasi identity" that I have come toaccept as my own. Growing up, I was simply told that it is my blood that gives me the right to this identity. This is, however, far from the truth.

My paternal grandfather was an "Ao" from Nagaland. The last name I inherited by virtue of the matrilineal system belongs to the "Pnar" ancestors who, at some point in time, migrated to the "Khasi hills".

In realising this, one finds that "Khasi-ness" as defined by the "Khasi jingoists"/ "Khla-Wait Ka Ri" makes it corrupted, toxic and deplorable. To them, "Khasi-ness" attains a divine status that further implies the delusional belief of "Khasi" as a superior race. For these Khla- Wait to sustain the delusional superiority in being "Khasi", it almost seems necessary to instil fear and hatred of the "non-Khasi" through lies, propaganda, and punishments.

Evidently, the lies and propaganda have for years been spread in private and shared spaces, we find them in the riots, the clashes, the "Khasi awakening day(s)", the Amit Paul saga, and more recently, the amendment to the Lineage Bill. Authors of criticisms and questions that do not side with the Khla-Wait have mostly been accused of implying a betrayal of one's "Khasi-ness" and therefore, a lack of the "Mynsiem Khasi"(The Khasi Spirit).

I do not know what the "Mynsiem Khasi" really is, but what has been pronounced through these riots and clashes and particularly H S Shylla's response to critics of the lineage bill, the "Mynsiem Khasi" appears to be the spirit aligning with ideologies that are xenophobic, racist, and misogynistic. To have the "Mynsiem Khasi" is to bear support for the system of patriarchy that these Khla-Wait uphold. To have the "Mynsiem Khasi" is to strengthen their fragile masculinity. To have the "Mynsiem Khasi" is to bathe in the lies and the hate that they perpetuate.My fear is that the "Mynsiem Khasi" would become (or maybe it already is) the spirit akin to ones held by Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan.

The last name I inherited by virtue of the matrilineal system belongs to the "Pnar" ancestors who, at some point in time, migrated to the "Khasi hills". The genetic history of my paternal grandmother and my maternal grandfather could be just as or more complicated.

The genetic history of my paternal grandmother and my maternal grandfather could be just as or more complicated. My blood then, is definitely notpurely "Khasi".

However, despite this impurity, I was raised to believe that I am a "Khasi". As a child, being "Khasi" meant that I lived and grew up with other people who also believe that they are "Khasi", it meant that I have been given the tradition shared by the people who collectively (and proudly) refer to it as the "Khasi Tradition", and it also meant that I speak the common language i.e. "Khasi".

However, as I make "Khasi-ness" my own, my belongingness in the "Khasi space" was always interrogated by the nerve I had/have to exist in this space while bearing the face of an outsider. But this also begs the question, is there an identifiable "Khasi look"? And if such a thing exist, does it mean that all those who do not come close to bearing such a look are "not Khasi"? Despite my limited knowledge, I know that there are many people who call themselves "Khasi", not all of them have distinguishing features that qualifies them as looking "Khasi" enough (or not).

However, there exist others who claim that it is behaviour (which isn't really constant) or clothes (maybe?) or language (anyone can learn a language) that gives a "Khasi" away.Honestly, I believe that identifying a "Khasi" is much more complex than this. And should we somehow identify another person who calls herself/himself a "Khasi", the burden of determining their genetic history begins (should we want to engage in the impossible task of accurately ascertaining their "Khasi-ness", as implied by the Lineage Bill).

DNA tests would suggest a truly pure "Khasi" as an impossibility, given how people constantly mix with each other through migration, immigration and so on. This makes"Khasi"an abstract, a notion we built in our minds that may somehow, find a place in our hearts (figuratively, of course).

Honestly, I believe that identifying a "Khasi" is much more complex than this. And should we somehow identify another person who calls herself/ himself a "Khasi", the burden of determining their genetic history begins (should we want to engage in the impossible task of accurately ascertaining their "Khasi-ness".

In light of the above, I find that it is imperative that in the midst of these conversations around the screwed-up Lineage Bill that we reflect on what it means to be "Khasi" and further on what the "Khasi experience" is.

For a people whose history remains largely unwritten, who in our own way survived colonial rule (albeit if the colonial system has injected itself into the structure of our society), and who even in being part of the Indian State have been denied/ have consciously rejected our given "Indian-ness", perhaps "Khasi" becomes a resolution, a cry of a people to be unapologetically their own. But if this is so, then "Khasi" needs to further be reimagined and redefined in order for "Khasi-ness" to mean an active rejection of the barriers and the chains that the Khla-Wait have devised. Thus, in claiming one's "Khasi-ness", I or anyone should not have to engage in/contribute to a system of suppression, oppression and alienation.

TO THE EDITOR

Vendors and Sweeper's Colony

Editor,

I fully endorse the recent letter by Jenniefer Dkhar in your esteemed daily, on the above subject which mentions the proposed use of the present Sweeper's Colony for, I presume, the vendors in and around the Iew Duh area. This will be a big help to the Iew Duh area but the problem of vendors in other parts of the city will also have to be looked into. Perhaps the vendors at Police Bazaar can be shifted into the white elephant Hotel Crowborough. For the benefit of the public at large, the shifting of the Sweeper's Colony is advisable but the Government will have to overcome the objections of the residents at the colony and also the objections of the people to where the colony will be shifted. Once a place is identified for relocation, the only way out for the government is to make the relocation very attractive, in fact, so attractive that the people of the colony will find it impossible to say no. In other words, make them want to move. Of course, some attractions will also have to be offered to the people of the area to where the colony will be shifted. Attractions may be in the form of free power, free water, free schooling for a period of time apart from other inducements which may be thought of. This of course, may not be a fool proof solution to the problem but it is, perhaps, something worth considering. Shillong is bursting at the seams and is a tinder box awaiting just a small spark as we had seen recently. Hence the Government should take up these issues very seriously.

Yours etc.,
D. M. Pariat,
Aberystwyth,
Wales.

NRC outcome a wake-up call

Editor,

Every sovereign country should safeguard its borders with strict vigil in view of the potential security fallout. For this, all countries in the world have their own Constitutions which their citizens should adhere to. In this the leaders must be extra alert and totally unbending. Needless to say, there are various punitive measures to deal with those crossing borders illegally, ranging from short detention to monetary fine; from a harsh jail sentence to even inhuman physical torture. But in our country, it is the opposite. Here illegal migrants are welcomed with crazy incentives and the assurance of protection. Yes, certain political parties walk those illegal migrants through and settle them down. They instantly provide Epic card, ration card and other freebies. What more, they are even allowed to flex their muscles! We There is definite data of illegal migrants involved in acts of terror. Who are the victims here? It is us the original inhabitants, the citizens of the country.

It's time to open our ears and eyes and our inner sensibilities to identify the real culprits here. Who has been involved in this act of treason for decades? Look at Mamata Banerjee's stance against NRC. It is all aimed at building vote banks. Can we allow politicians to have their way here? They have long sold their souls for power and pelf. They have nothing to lose. It is us the citizens who have everything to lose.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

Adultery - a criminal offence?

Editor,

A Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court consisting of Chief Justice Dipak Mishra and four other justices including are presently examining the constitutional validity of Section 497 of the Indian penal Code which deals with adultery.A batch of petitioners has assailed the provision of Section 497 of IPC on various grounds. The provision is discriminatory because it punishes only the man. It allows only the husband whose wife is in an adulterous relationship to file a complaint of adultery, while withholding this right to the wife of a man in an adulterous relationship. Whereas the provision does not make an offence if a married man has sex with an unmarried woman, or a married woman with an unmarried man. Also Section 497 makes adultery a criminal offence if a married man has sexual intercourse with the wife of another man without the latter's "connivance" or "consent".

On 2nd August, 2018 while hearing the petitions the Bench observed that adultery could be a ground for divorce under civil law but making it a criminal offence, as the current law does, appeared irrational and unconstitutional. Reason being it interfered with an individual's sexual autonomy and the current adultery law punished only the man and could thereby violate the right to equality before law.

One of the Judges argued about the sexual autonomy of women in abusive relationships, wondering why they should be prevented from seeking "solace and comfort" outside marriage. In fact the husband beating the wife is a fact-of-life in most Indian families and since formalizing divorce takes time, there is nothing wrong if she seeks "solace and comfort in a relationship which will give her happiness. It was also argued that both men and women should have a certain degree of sexual autonomy.The bench clarified that it was not considering whether women too should be punished for the offence-it was only examining the constitutionality of the provision since it punishes only the man involved (with up to five years jail).

However the Court also held that although adultery may be considered not to be a criminal offence, it is "morally impermissible"-for both husband and wife. At the same time Section 497 fails to make the offence gender-neutral unlike Section 494 (bigamy), which makes men and women equally liable for prosecution. Another judge felt that Section 479 could be struck down on the grounds of violation of Article 14 (equality) for it seeks to prosecute only the man. Again both parties who are engaged in adultery derive the benefit of the act, where one party is treated as offender and the other as victim, whereas in a marriage both the man and the wife have to equally respect the marriage and have equal responsibility.

At a point of time when "living together" and LGBT have got legal sanction there is ample reason and ground for striking down Section 497 and ensuring equality before law and gender parity both for men and women as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Yours etc.,
Samares
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court
Camp: Shillong

"Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written."
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times
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In Bad Taste

THERE was bad political odour over the burial of Tamil Nadu titan M. Karunanidhi at the Marina grounds where his mentor C N Annadurai's Memorial had been erected. The Madras High Court waived aside the AIADMK government's refusal to grant permission for Karunanidhi's cremation at the hallowed site. The TN Government's reason for the refusal was that Karunanidhi had not died in harness as Chief Minister. Previously Annadurai, MGR and Jayalalitha has been accorded the honour. Rajgopalachari and Kamaraj were cremated at a different location. Karunanidhi was one of the most respected politicians in India. He had been a mentee of former chief minister and a torch -bearer of the father of the Dravidian Movement, Annadurai. It was not without reason that the DMK leadership asked for the veteran leader to receive the funeral honour. Congress Chief Ministers in the past had no such legitimate claim. The AIADMK government under Edappadi K. Palaniswami seemed politically motivated. Karunanidhi was very much of a legatee of Annadurai's inspired leadership as any AIADMK Chief Minister. He spread Annadurai's message for over half a century. Protocol and precedent should have been waived in this case and Palaniswami should have risen above cheap political gimmicks.

True the DMK moved court in the past against allowing a memorial to Jayalalitha in the Marina Grounds. That may have led the AIADMK to pay the DMK back in its own coin. But the insult to Karunanidhi's memory may have caused a ruckus in Tamil Nadu. The Madras High Court has now saved the situation. Karunanidhi was respected across party lines and beyond Tamil Nadu. He was a great leader, administrator and public individual. The AIADMK cabinet sullied its image causing the unseemly controversy. One wonders what J. Jayalalitha would have done if she was alive. This also brings us to a juncture in this country's history where political expediency guides most decision making even at the level of the Central Government. And every such political controversy lands up at the steps of the judiciary. This is not a welcome development as the courts have more important issues of human injustices to deal with rather than resolving issues that are in the realm of political shenanigans. Laws are sought to be made without keeping the Constitutional principles in mind. Naturally such laws are contested in the courts of law. The Madras High Court was unnecessarily dragged into a matter than involved two political rivals. This does not bode well for the country.

Lineage Bill Amendment: An Attempt to fix politics?

By Patricia Mukhim

Books are a great repository of knowledge because most of them are written after years of research. Reading Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow by Yuval Noah Harari taught me a lot about the modern God called Dataism and how it could possibly fix our elections henceforth because our algorithms are so well understood by the Internet of Things and how it guides us better than our emotions. Harari says, Dataism offers groundbreaking technologies and immense new powers for politicians, business people and ordinary consumers. Dataism inverts the traditional pyramid of learning. Hitherto data was seen as only the first step in a long chain of intellectual activity. Humans were supposed to distil data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom. But Dataists now believe that humans can no longer cope with the immense flow of data hence they cannot distil data into information, let alone knowledge into wisdom. The work of processing data should therefore be entrusted to electronic algorithms whose capacity far exceeds that of the human brain. In practice this means that Dataists are sceptical about human knowledge and wisdom and prefer to put their trust in Big Data and computer algorithms.

Dataism is the result of a wedlock between computer science and biology. Harari says it was biology's embrace of Dataism that turned a limited breakthrough in computer science into a world shattering cataclysm that may completely transform the very nature of life. The rapid change in data processing conditions could lead to the decline and even disappearance of democracy. With the volume and speed of data increase, venerable institutions like elections, political parties and parliaments might become obsolete not because they are unethical but because they cannot process data efficiently enough. Let's not kid ourselves that Dataism does not control our lives yet. Look around and we will see every young person standing alone and looking at his/her smart-phone checking out what the internet is telling him/her. They are so inclined to believe what they see and read that even before processing the information they have quickly forwarded it to friends because information sharing, even if that information is skewed or false has become the order of the day. Filing FIRs with the police against those who spread lies and falsehoods is only one small step. I don't like to say this but in the world ruled by Dataism even the police are not on top of things. And we cannot blame them because Dataism is far ahead of the human mind.

The coming decades might see more internet revolutions where technology will steal a march over politics. Then there's Artificial Intelligence (AI) and biotechnology which could overhaul not only our societies and economies but our bodies and minds too. We just need to look at our choices today and how they are dictated by what we read online about food, books, holidays, lifestyles, health choices et al. We are creatures dictated by the Internet.

According to Harari, present day democratic structures are unable to collect and process data fast enough and most voters don't understand biology and cybernetics well enough to make informed choices. Hence traditional democratic politics is losing control of events and is failing to present us with meaningful visions of the future. Even ordinary voters can sense that the democratic mechanisms no longer empower them. They see the world changing all around them and don't understand how or why things change so rapidly. What they clearly understand is that Power has shifted away from them; they are not in control and their votes hardly matter but they don't know where that Power has shifted. The example of Britain is exemplary. Voters thought that power had shifted to the European Union so they voted for Brexit. Now they find things are not much better than it was pre-Brexit. In the US the perception that the 'establishment' monopolises all power prompted voters to go for the anti-establishment Donald Trump who castigates and pulverises all institutions that the Americans have learnt to trust. But what voters learnt to their dismay is despite all these changes Power will not shift back to them. But because the Power vacuum will not last long it is possible that far more complex yet efficient structures will evolve to take their place. The tough question is who will build and control these structures if humans are no longer up to the task. Is this then where AI will step in? It sounds ominous and somewhat Sci-fi but it seems that that's the trajectory we are moving towards.

To understand our own predicament and how politics has divided us it is important to understand what helps us form bonds. Healthy societies are defined by their ability to find galaxies of warm, non-threatening spaces within which they move and interact such as families, friends, hobby groups, neighbourhoods, faith organisations or even cultural or civil society groups. But politics has driven a wedge and disrupted such groups. Today we are talking at each other; not to one another and whoever uses vulgar, provocative speech rules the roost. All that mushy mushy "Tip Briew Tip Blei" is replaced by a robust masochistic bellicosity. The roots of political dysfunction lie deep in society. If we are disrupted by politics and political rhetoric and we now take positions that are outright pugnacious, then perhaps our own social bonds and networks were never strong enough. As David Brooks so cogently stated in one of his articles, "People put politics at the centre of their psychological, emotional and even spiritual life. This is asking too much of politics. Once politics becomes your ethnic and moral identity it becomes impossible to compromise because it becomes 'dishonour.' If you put politics at the centre of identity you end up asking the state to eclipse every social authority but itself."

Durkheim the father of Sociology was very sceptical of the power of unaided reason to penetrate the complexities of social and moral reality. But if politics with its unaided reason enters into the galaxy of this already complex moral and social reality we can imagine the contortions we will pass through. This is exactly what we see in Khasi society today. It is an attempt by politics (KHADC) with its limited exposure to the world beyond it, to fix the social and moral norms of society that is already beset by the myriad complexities of cybernetics. So many young people today meet their prospective brides and grooms on the internet. Did we visualise that such a thing would come to pass? We have friends who pledge their affection on Facebook but who we have never met. Business transactions are no longer all in the physical domain; they happen over cyberspace. Meetings happen over skype. No wonder physical interface between the Kur (clan) members is also dwindling because time has become a constraint. And yet we know that the Kur is the bedrock of Khasi society because it is there when we need it; at times of joys and sorrows or just to stand by us. In that sense a Khasi is never alone.

A law therefore that seeks to isolate a Khasi woman and her children from her clan for transgressing the KHADC strictures, (marrying a non-Khasi) actually hits at this bedrock of Khasi society. It is the clan that has the right to decide whether to accept or reject any member. So far, incest (marrying within the clan) is the only reason that clan heads use to ostracise its members as this is considered a taboo.

As far as the Sixth Schedule status is concerned, perhaps the jurors advising the Council had failed to point out to the CEM, KHADC what Mr Toki Blah had recently cited. Article 342 (1) says, 'The President may with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purpose of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory, as the case may be.

(2) Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under 'the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.'

In other words the District Councils have no power whatsoever to de-classify any member of the Schedule Tribe because that power rests with Parliament. And to de-notify a member of a Scheduled Tribe only on the basis of marriage is something that no court of law would ever uphold because that is pure and simple "injustice" with no legal merit. Besides, laws made by Parliament apply across District Councils. Some food for thought perhaps!

The plight of indigenous peoples in India

By Barnes Mawrie

August 9 is observed as International Day of Indigenous Peoples. I am inclined to offer a reflection on this topic. Dictionaries define indigenous as "originating in a particular region or country, native, innate, inherent, natural." The word dates back to the Latin word indigena, meaning native or original inhabitant. The word indigenous has many meanings. In every region of the world, many different cultural groups live together and interact, but not all of these groups are considered indigenous or native to their particular geographic area. In fact, it is those groups who claim a shared sense of identity who are internationally recognized as "indigenous peoples."

Throughout human history, peoples have migrated to various regions of the Earth, and cultures have mingled and exchanged influences. For these reasons the identification of indigenous peoples is not always straightforward and simple. Indigenous peoples inhabit large areas of the Earth's surface. Spread across the world from the Arctic to the South Pacific, they number, at a rough estimate, over 370 million people in 90 countries. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures. They make up less than 5 per cent of the world's population, but account for 15 per cent of the poorest.

Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples are so-called because they were living on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere. They are the descendants—according to one definition—of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement, or other means. Most indigenous peoples around the world have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are clearly distinct from those of the other segments of the national populations.

Throughout human history, whenever dominant neighbouring peoples have expanded their territories or settlers from far away have acquired new lands by force, the cultures and livelihood—even the very existence—of indigenous peoples have been endangered. The threats to indigenous peoples' cultures and lands, to their status and other legal rights as distinct groups and as citizens, do not always take the same forms as in earlier times. Although some groups have been Indigenous Peoples of the World relatively successful, in most of the world indigenous peoples are still actively seeking recognition of their identities and ways of life. In spite of cultural and ethnic diversity, there are often striking similarities between the problems, grievances, and interests of the various indigenous peoples and, therefore, in their presentations to international forums. Participation of indigenous communities and organizations in United Nations meetings has served to highlight these similarities. It has often been the case—particularly since the emergence of new nations in the wave of decolonization which followed the Second World War—that indigenous peoples insist on retaining their separate identity and cultural heritage. It is now generally admitted that policies of assimilation and integration aimed at bringing these groups fully into the mainstream of majority populations are usually counter-productive.

Coming to North-east India, the tribal communities in this region, are the indigenous peoples. So by the very definition of indigeneity, they are the rightful owners of the land. The current NRC issue in Assam is a clear manifestation of a struggle of indigenous peoples to recuperate their ancestral land which they have lost due to an unchecked immigration from bordering countries and states. Other tribal areas like Meghalaya, Nagaland and others are experiencing the same threatening demographic phenomenon. Perhaps Tripura presents the worst situation of all, where we see the indigenous communities being reduced to a small minority and have lost much of their land and sovereignty due to the overwhelming influx of outsiders especially from Bangladesh.

The current NRC issue in Assam is a clear manifestation of a struggle of indigenous peoples to recuperate their ancestral land which they have lost due to an unchecked immigration from bordering countries and states. Other tribal areas like Meghalaya, Nagaland and others are experiencing the same threatening demographic phenomenon.

As always and anywhere in the world, the indigenous communities are victims of exploitation of every sort, political, economic etc. For centuries, the tribal communities of North-east India have been experiencing discrimination and marginalization right from the time of the British Government to the present day. Today another form of exploitation is cropping up, namely an exploitation along religious sentiments. There are external forces which are trying to divide the tribal communities along religious lines. This is posing a greater threat to the identity and integrity of the tribal communities. All these negative factors are creating a fear psychosis among indigenous peoples of our region and naturally they fall into a defensive mode. At times we witness a violent reaction in the form of militancy which has become a scourge of our region. However, on this day it is appropriate to think of the plight of indigenous peoples all over India. They are still a section of the population that is being discriminated in every way and are being exploited in every sense. Will the Government be still immune to their sufferings and deaf to their constant plea for justice?

TO THE EDITOR

A Khasi Mother's perspective

Editor,

A lot has been said and heard on the Khasi Social Customs of Lineage (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018. It is heartening to see a handful of Khasi men still respecting a woman's freedom of choice and voicing their concerns through this newspaper. Kudos to the courage of these 'Khat-ar-bor'. I am also grateful to my female compatriot for presenting some insights into the flaws of the bill. As a young working mother of three children, I cannot even accept the fact that this proposed Bill aims to rob my children of their Khasi identity. As mothers we have carried them for nine months in our wombs, breastfed them, had sleepless nights watching over them, worry about their slightest sneeze, cared for them and our world is a happy place when we come home to their little arms and smiles. All we pray for is their good health and happiness. Any parent ultimately will want to see their children happy and settled and for them to be with someone who respect, loves, cares for them and makes them happy. Instead of lecturing them or advising them over the identity of their life partner, we would rather spend our energy in giving them an education where they can be financially independent, empathetic human beings and 'kiba tip briew tip Blei.'

I am a proud Khasi woman belonging to the 'WarNongbri' clan. Whenever I meet people from outside the state and outside the country I would proudly explain about our matrilineal system, our clan and kinship ties and how we have certain privileges when compared to our female counterparts in the rest of the country. I would explain to them that there is less stigmatisation of women. Women who bear children out of wedlock are not stigmatised and that we have the freedom to choose our partners (I hope and pray that this will not change for our children).

What appals me is how a group comprising of 29 or so MDCs can decide on behalf of the Jaidynriew; decide on my clan's behalf; decide on my behalf which ultimately means they decide for the future of my children! Is social and clan concurrence not required? We are not fools to be blinded, silenced and deceived in the name of protecting the Jaidbynriew. I will not allow this Bill to coax me to disown my own children and grandchildren if ever they marry any person of their choice. I will always have my mynsiem kmie with me till the last breath I take. Let us not rob our children's freedom of choice when we ourselves have enjoyed it thanks to the wisdom of our forefathers.

Yours etc.,
R Jennifer War
Via email

Praising the elected

Editor,

Amid the din and dust of battle raised by the KHADC Lineage Bill, two news reports with major developmental potentials for Shillong in particular and the state in general, somehow appeared to have slipped the notice of many. The first relates to the meeting of the Laban MLA, Mr Sanbor Shullai with the Defence Minister at New Delhi. According to reports Mr Shullai had pressed for the early retransfer of the Garrison Grounds to the State Govt for the benefit of the public at large. Before the creation of Meghalaya the public had free access to these grounds for sports and recreational purposes. Then the Army stepped in, reserved the grounds for itself and shut off public access probably for security reasons. As far as one could ascertain the only items of strategic value were the weeds and the grass but that's the Army for you! The vision of the civil authorities on the other hand is to develop the grounds for public advantage, especially with an eye on the forthcoming National games 2022. The attempt by Mr Shullai to regain civil control over the grass therefore demands public recognition, support and appreciation. We wish him well.

The other issue relates to an attempt by another MLA, Mr PT Sawkmie of Mawlai, to sort out the traffic mess all of us find ourselves in. Shillong with its narrow roads, uncontrolled vehicular population, uncivil drivers (especially those provided with Govt escorts), impudent hawkers, a lifeless discredited municipality and undermanned traffic personnel has become a nightmare for everyone. Helpless and stationary vehicles rather than moving ones occupy our roads and it has become the order of the day. Everyone grumbles, curses and moans about it; raise their hands to God for help, but till date very few have taken the pains to do anything about it.

One is therefore pleasantly surprised to find Mr PT Sawkmie on the job and actively engaged in coming up with solutions on how to ease the publics' woes. He has called up the Traffic branch and together with the police made on the spot surveys of the traffic bottle necks within Mawlai. He had personally inspected the under construction Mawlai bypass to ensure its early completion. His most recent foray is a joint inspection with the police and the PWD authorities on the viability of a flyover/ flyovers along the GS Road within his constituency. It seems emphasis was on a flyover over the choke point at Thangkhiew Petrol Pump, Mawlai. No one can deny the crying need for alternate means to ease Shillong traffic congestions. This initiative of Bah Sawkmie too is an instance where public servants need our support and goodwill. Public representatives when they actively champion public good should be appreciated. And why not, for that exactly is the reason we elected them in the first place.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah
President ICARE

"A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone."
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times
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What's with the SUV fetish?

It's unbelievable that a new Government which is barely a few months old would raise the cap on the purchase price of vehicles amounting to several lakh rupees. This is a fetish that would prove very costly for the Government. A state that relies heavily on central dole and one that does not even have enough resources to pay for maintenance and repair of roads has no business to spend on luxury vehicles. If the MLAs and bureaucrats want to ride high end vehicles they should just buy their own. Many of them can afford a Mercedes, a BMW and even a Bentley if they choose to so why use public money for that? The Government certainly has very wrong priorities. Why spend Rs 40 lakh for the Chief Minister's and Governor's vehicle? May we ask who the suppliers are and whether there is a transparent tendering/ bidding process here?

Those who have taken the road to one of the oldest colleges in the state – the Union Christian College (UCC) in Umiam know the condition of that road. It has been eroded by coal carrying trucks coming from West Khasi Hills for nearly three years now. The road hardly exists and yet that place has several institutions of repute and tourist resorts as well. Perhaps it is to manoeuvre such dilapidated roads that those in Government need the best vehicles that will not break their fragile backs. Well, the spines of ordinary commuters are important too. Since Meghalaya features poorly in governance one would have thought that good governance would be the MDA Government's priority, which would include austerity measures. As it is roads in Shillong are repaired every year because the repair work is shoddy. There is large scale corruption at every stage of the process. The road to one of the leading health institutes of the region – NEIGRIHMS was completely flooded during the recent downpour. That road has been under construction for over a year. How long does it take to repair a 5 km road? And what about ambulances carrying patients that need emergency treatment at NEIGHRIMS but are slowed down by the poor quality of the road? Should the PWD not be held responsible for this and by extension the whole Government? When roads are so decrepit, how can the Government spend money on expensive vehicles? It just does not make sense. The MDA Government has to set out clear priorities for itself and think of the people who have elected it with high hopes of seeing better governance.

Khasi men must rise to the challenge

By Gary Marbaniang

I was traveling alone to Guwahati airport today when I somehow managed to strike a conversation with a Khasi woman who is about my age and sometimes such conversations do bring forth interesting revelations!

When I boarded the taxi, the woman was already seated in the front seat, and I had no idea about her race until she started making those phone calls in Khasi. And as she started talking I realized that this lady is a well travelled woman and I started connecting all the dots to determine her profession. When she mentioned all the mega cities of the world like Manchester, Frankfurt and Tel Aviv in her phone conversation, I fit the pieces of the puzzle together and came to the conclusion that her profession might be in the aviation industry. Finally when we reached the airport and alighted from the taxi, her face looked somewhat familiar, at which point I realized that we studied together in the same school!

So that's how our conversation started and we ended up having small talk about the weather and stuff and it did turn out that she is working as an air hostess with a reputed international airline. Before she boarded her flight, talks about marriage unexpectedly crept into the conversation and it turn out that she is a single independent Khasi woman who didn't seem too keen on the idea of marriage. So when I cheekily suggested to her to find a suitable white man, she simply laughed off my suggestion though it did seems to me that my suggestion was out of the box and something which is beyond the realm of possibility. To many Khasi women today especially the urban educated ones, the idea of marrying someone from outside your community seems a little far- fetched and a little out of place.

The sad part about Khasi society today, on the other hand, is that Khasi women are doing much better than Khasi men in all spheres of life. The pertinent question that arises is whether all Khasi women are "wonder women" with far greater capabilities than men or whether they are far more ambitious and hard working. The first part about Khasi women being wonder women seems highly improbable but the second part about them being more hard working and ambitious is without shadow of a doubt the main reason why they are doing far better than men in education and even in terms of employment. The Khasi lady I was talking about earlier has been working in the international aviation industry since she completed her 12th standard. That seems to suggest that she already got her life sorted out even before she entered the stage of womanhood!

To set the record straight, Khasi society is one of the most equitable society in India when it comes to raising our children! The idea of bringing in a law to bring in equity in the distribution of wealth seems ludicrous. It still fascinates me today when I remember my father telling me about the time when his great paternal grandmother passed away. His paternal grandfather was the youngest of seven siblings, all boys, and when their mother died it was mutually decided by all of them that as part of paying homage to their departed mother, they would give up a portion of their hard earned wealth by throwing a feast for the entire village for months on end. My great grandfather and his siblings worked their socks off in the oranges plantation for more than nine months and they would had the opportunity to stay in their own village for only three months but they didn't have any qualms when it comes to parting away with their hard earned wealth since they valued their cherished tradition.

Likewise my grandfather was a self made businessman who started his life from scratch and who at one point of time became extremely wealthy. He on the other hand was a philanthropist who never refused to lend when people asked for financial help. He would give all his money away and he managed to leave very little even for my only aunt (my father's younger sister).That's how the cycle of life works. When it comes to wealth, uncertainty is the name of the game!

When it comes to equitable distribution of wealth, the question that arises in the first place is what percentage of Khasi families today have wealth in the family to distribute it equally among their children! The world today is made up of families who are either poor or middle class and the idea of distributing wealth is out of the question since in the first place most families today don't have enough wealth to distribute. And for anybody to make a hue and cry about anyone not getting a fair share of ancestral property in our society is something which needs further research and examination to reveal the plausibility of such a suggestion. If the government was to implement a law that will make equitable distribution of income binding on all Khasi families, then all hell will break loose and our under-staffed judicial system will simply collapse. Lawsuits galore will be the order of the day in Khasi society and love which is supposed to be the bedrock of all family ties will be thrown out of the window.

I can say with utmost surety that most boys in Khasi society are treated with love and affection. I am the youngest of six children and know fully well the extent and meaning of pampered love. When I was born, my father was about to enter the dreaded phase in life which in a married person's terminology is simply known as mid life crisis. So I guess that the moment my mother gave birth to me it might have erased all the crazy thought of experiencing a mid life crisis that might have crept into my father's mind. So I was given the extra love from my parents especially my father and my siblings showered me with the same kind of love. Growing up I would always get the best of everything and my siblings don't seem to mind at all. If a law on equitable distribution of wealth was to be implemented, jealousy and bad blood will reign supreme in the family. Rather than distributing wealth equally we must give all our children the same opportunity at finding their own feet in life! That's how love works and that's how Khasi society has been functioning for a long time now. The idea of feeding our kids with a silver spoon is something which should be outrightly discouraged.

All I want to say is that the world and ladies in particular look up to a self-made caring responsible man! Calling on all Khasi men to get their act together and take upon themselves the onus of making something of themselves. I think all Khasi men and women alike would agree that when the likes of Eugeneson Lyngdoh shines on the national arena, all our hearts are filled with utmost joy and pride at the success of a fellow Khasi!

India's foreign policy comes of age under Modi

New approach focuses on economic benefits

By Rapti Ray & Dr. Buddhadeb Ghosh

The 'Prime Minister stays in foreign countries and occasionally visits India.' Such is the allegation of opposition parties against Narendra Modi. But they are not admitting the fact that India's foreign policy for the first time since 1947 has reached a youthful stage after 70 years of childhood.

The Modi government certainly has not altogether reversed the path of foreign policy followed in previous decades, as it is neither feasible, nor desirable. No country's foreign policy can be partisan, and there can never be a tectonic shift when governments change. It is a continuum, at best modifying the path followed by all previous regimes.

However, despite this inevitable fact, Narendra Modi's ambition has imparted a new dimension to India's foreign policy since 2014.

The very approach of Modi is 'India First'. That is, to draw the maximum out of foreign policy for the economic development of India as a whole and move towards the NDA government's goal 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' – a Hindi slogan which Narendra Modi coined from his Lok Sabha Election campaign since 2013. Added to it is the great Sanskrit dictum from India's great historical past: "VasudhaivaKutumbakam." It's a Sanskrit phrase, a philosophy that inculcates an understanding that the whole world is one family. This verse of Maha Upanishad is engraved at the entrance of parliament hall.

This slogan became so popular that US Secretary of State John Kerry, prior to his India visit in 2014 (after the Modi government came to power), mentioned it and said America shared this goal and was willing to work in full cooperation with the new government to realize it. He arrived in New Delhi to prepare the ground for Modi's US visit, which was uncertain at that time. What a contrast to what was the reality some ten years back.

In 2005, Modi was denied a US visa by the then US President George W Bush. America's allegation against Modi was his violation of human rights when he was chief minister of Gujarat. But in the Lok Sabha elections Modi's landslide victory proved that he has to be given due importance at the international level. In fact, the next US President, Barrack Obama, was the chief guest during India's Republic Day celebrations in 2015. This could not be imagined earlier. After Obama, Modi also has met with Donald Trump and is engaging in talks with him on trade, purchase of airplanes, natural gas imports and combating terrorism among other issues. In addition to this, Modi's visit to Israel has created enormous possibilities for India's defence, which is causing high BP hatred for our neighbours.

The main pillars of India's foreign policy under the Modi's government may be stated as follows: Firstly, there is the 'Act East Policy'. The 'Look East Policy' initiated during Atal Behari Vajpayee's time has been rebranded as Act East Policy. During the Look East Policy some strategic partnership initiatives and cooperation in the field of security had been started with South East Asian countries. But the Modi government wants a more dynamic policy, as external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj has said, "India is not just looking east, but acting east as well." The Act East Policy is based on the Modi government's stress on 'Neighbourhood First' policy, which focuses on immediate neighbours in South and South East Asia and also Asia-Pacific regions.

Secondly, India wants to counter China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) Policy, which is aimed at capturing the market along the entire traditional Silk Road. However, New India is against it as the proposed roadway passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). Some other nations have also opposed it as it is alleged that their sovereignty is jeopardized. Many experts are of the opinion that China's main objective is to dump low quality goods in entire Asia and Europe by opening up the roadways and enhancing maritime connectivity. However, many are unable to see through China's policy, as it is building up infrastructures in those cities and spending annually $10,000 crore. In response to China's 'aggression' in trade and commerce, India is giving more importance to its maritime neighbours along the Indian Ocean Region.

With the same objective, that is, to counter China's OBOR project, the Narendra Modi government has introduced 'Project Mausam'. Historically, trade along Indian Ocean Region, stretching from South East Asia to East Africa proceeded through sea routes, which naturally depends on seasonal climatic conditions. The Government of India has strategically given the name 'Project Mausam' to stress that India is no less important than China in trade, commerce and also in enhancing security.

Thirdly, there is the 'West Asia Policy' and 'Link West Policy' with the Arab and Gulf cities. These are complementary to Act East Policy. India depends on these countries for its oil import and for providing employment to many Indians.

Fourthly, relationship with Britain and France in particular and Europe as a whole and also Eurasia is gaining importance under Modi. For example, in 2015, Modi visited Germany and inaugurated the 'Hannover Fair', which is the world's largest industrial fair. India was a partner country and the Modi government stressed on cooperation in Digital India and Clean India initiatives.

Regarding Eurasia, Modi inked agreements on long term oil and gas cooperation between ONGC Videsh, Essar Oil of India and Russia's Rosneft and Gazprom. Russian President Vladimir Putin has promised to install ten more nuclear reactors in India in the next 20 years. Russia will also export raw diamond to India directly, not through mediators like Dubai and Belgium. In the area of defence too, the two countries have signed technical cooperation and investment agreements. There is also cooperation with France and between Indian Navy and Mauritian coast guard. Many Indians live in the African island of Mauritius and earn their living, and that is why the government is giving additional importance to this country.

The entire pinpoint of Modi government's foreign policy is to bring in economic development and advance its Make in India, Digital India, Soil India and Smart city programmes by pursuing diplomatic policies. This objective of linking India's foreign policy to domestic transformation so much exclusively is surely a paradigm shift in the Modi regime. However, a word of caution at this point is that increased insurgency may pose a threat for smooth operation of India's foreign policy. So greater importance should be given to combat terrorism and associated unrest for the sake of advancing 'India First Policy' in foreign relations. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Visit to Krem Mawmluh

Editor,

It is indeed a unique privilege for Mawmluh to be instrumental in the naming of the latest geological age. The Meghalayan Age is named after the State, courtesy the stalagmite that was taken from Mawmluh Cave for sample study in the University of California.

Mawmluh, even before the coming of the British, had been well known among the Khasis and Jaiñtias for varied reasons. It was a premier province of the Hima Khatsawphra generating huge revenue for the coffers back in Nongkhlaw through its flourishing iron industry. It produced the finest warriors for the Hima. The rich and extensive limestone deposits in Mawmluh tempted the British and they snatched it away from the Hima Khatsawphra to make it a British area. Two of the greatest stalwarts of Khasi Literature, Rabon Singh Kharsuka and Radhon Singh Berry Kharwanlang, hailed from Mawmluh. And, of course, in later years, it became famous for the cement produced by the Mawmluh Cherra Cements Limited, because of a high-rated quality of limestone from the Mawmluh quarries.

For general information, especially to tourists and cave lovers, in the State and the outside world, no visit to the cave is allowed till the rainy season ends. At places, the water inside the cave reaches almost to the ceiling. Lay people should not enter the cave without guides for it is ultra-difficult to negotiate. In the meantime, any party intending to visit the cave for research purposes should contact the Sirdar of Mawmluh.

Yours etc.,
PS Lyngdoh
Sirdar
Mawmluh Sirdarship

Article 16 a myth in the State Agri Dept

Editor,

Article 16 of the Indian Constitution states that "there shall be equality of opportunities for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state," but this is being violated by the State Agriculture Department. In a recent examination conducted by the Department for the technical posts in Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) of Meghalaya, the advertisement stated "preference will be given to bonded (sponsored/ stipendiary) candidates" (letter No. DAD-773/RCMT/ 2017-18/48. Dated- Shillong, the 18th April 2018). Isn't this an injustice to all the agricultural graduates who also slogged and sat for the examination held on May 23- 24, 2018? Yes, the bonded candidates or the so-called Meghalaya Agricultural Students and Graduates Association (MASGA) were the chosen ones sent by the Government to study as they secured higher percentage in their XII board exams (scoring a high percentage is not a hard task if you qualify from outside the state board exam, which some of the members of MASGA have). Isn't it a discrimination that due to limited seats offered by the state government, the non-MASGA, had to undertake their own education by getting a meagre stipend from the government? Why is the State Agriculture Department allowing this Union to think that what they scored in their XII board exam determines their right for a job? It's already been 10 years since the last recruitment in the Department. All the agricultural graduates are suffering equally and especially many of the seniors are on the verge of crossing the age limit for recruitment. Why can't the department give a fair and transparent system of recruitment where every candidate is equal and not judged by their Class XII board exam results?

Yours etc.,
Non-bonded
Agricultural Graduates of Meghalaya
(names withheld on request)

Why this needless expenditure?

Editor,

I cannot help but agree with CSWO and TUR in their protest over the decision of the State Government on the extravagant spending of public money. It is an open secret that at the time of their election campaigns, the representatives made tall claims and false promises before their voters, the fulfilment of which is forgotten once they are elected. It's common knowledge that a career in politics is one that establishes power and influence. Once they assume office, our representatives set their priorities well and place the self before the others. Swanky and expensive vehicles are a prime need of our representatives. All this at the expense of the public exchequer! While this is one side of the reality that our representatives enjoy, the other side is that of the general public that is sad and grim.

The general public have to face poor health care and sanitation, poor educational outcomes, unemployment, bad roads and of course the daily traffic jams. What would our Ministers and MLAs know about any of these? Let's take the example of teachers who are not paid their salaries for months. Do they even know under what circumstances these teachers fulfil their basic needs? Or let us turn our eyes towards the bad roads and traffic jams. How many of them experience a ride on roads filled with pot holes and puddles and how many of them are ever stuck in traffic jams? Roads that they ply to daily are repaired and black topped even if the they are still in good condition while roads that they do not travel on are left unrepaired and dilapidated. As they are the higher echelons there are no traffic rules for them. They can ply on any lane even if there are signages like 'NO ENTRY/NO RIGHT TURN/NO PARKING.' Even when there is a heavy traffic jam they will use their red beacons or blow their sirens and the poor traffic policeman has no choice but to be hard on the common man and allow them to pass through.

What is wrong with the present vehicles that they are using which are expensive and swanky? Why not limit the cost of vehicles for our representatives and make good, proper, needful and accountable use of money for the common good? The million dollar question is will they? Well the answer is known to all. Alas this is a sorry state of affairs!

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Women of all ages have a right to enter temples

Editor,

This refers to the letter, "Demeaning mothers is ungodly" by Salil Gewali (ST, August 4, 2018). I thank Salil Gewali for reminding me that a little learning is a dangerous thing. Indeed, we need to remember it all the time because it becomes dangerous only when we forget that we have learnt only a little. As Socrates very aptly said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Indeed, we need dialogue, debate and plasticity of mind to judge everything in an objective way.

Every day we attack the dirt of our body with soap, the dust of our home with a broom and the wastes of our country with a Swachh Bharat Abihiyan. But why do we do so? Is it because we hate our bodies, our homes and our country? No, it is only because we love our bodies, love our home and love our country. Similarly, when we criticize one of our dear friends for his tobacco smoking or a temple for banishing women for forty prime years of their lives, it is only because we want to keep our country healthy.

The writer of the letter rightly points out that I love to quote from Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. It is because they had a deep love for our diverse cultures from North East India to West India ~ from North India to South India, for our diverse religions and above all they had profound regard for our country's unity in diversity. That was the reason why they had very categorically criticized our prejudices, practices, myths and superstitions. They did it because of their love for the people of our country. As parents often criticize the wrong doings of their own children out of care and love for them.

The Supreme Court of India must be congratulated for its ruling that women of any age have the right to go inside the Sabarimala temple in Kerala just like their male counterparts. The Khetra Samrakshana Samiti told the five - judge Constitution Bench that the judges should not stop the religious practice of restricting the entry of women between the age 10 and 50 years into the Sabarimala temple. Representing the group, their lawyer said, "Any interference with the age-old custom will result in another Ayodhya and will create social tension in Kerala." But the Bench rightly responded to this with the comment, "Your custom must stand the test of constitutional provisions."

We see that the practice of the Sabarimala temple management enforcing a ban on entry of women for forty long years when they are the prime of their lives ~between the age ten and fifty which is also the age of their menstrual cycle, is nothing short of labelling women of that age group as not wanted or the most unwelcome group so far as the entry into the temple is concerned.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Silver nomads of Himalayas

The nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwals are known for the jewellery that their women wear. ***Kavita Suri*** reports



In all my growing up years in the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir, the nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwals fascinated me, one for their nomadic lifestyle and their oscillations between the higher reaches of mountains to the plains of Jammu in the winters along with their sheep and horses twice a year, secondly also for the beautiful jewellery that their women wear.

Perhaps, this is the reason that my love for silver jewellery rose to the level of a passion and donning the same in all these past years till now. Though I have myself a huge treasure of silver ornaments accumulated over the years from Jaipur to Sadar Bazar to Dilli Haat and even as far as Turtuk in the farthest end of Nubra Valley of Ladakh and Leh market too, the fascination for the silver jewellery of the nomads of Jammu and Kashmir still remains at the top.

The exotic Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribal women wear heavy and artistic jewellery most of which are made of silver. These are the members of the twin Scheduled Tribes who with their unique social, cultural and linguistic identities form the third largest community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Gujjars, primarily a nomadic community, over a passage of time have adopted a sedentary lifestyle in villages in the plains bordering the foothills and have taken to the cultivation of land as their primary occupation. However, a marginal population of Gujjars is semi-settled and combines the cultivation of land with pastoralism.

They are the ones who move to the lower and middle mountain areas of Pir Panjal pastures in the summer with their flock of buffaloes where they engage in cultivation and come back to the plains in the winters. Bakkarwals are still the ones who travel to as far as Dras and Kargil from Jammu plains as part of their traditional nomadic journeys.



The Gujjar and Bakkarwal females are fond of jewellery and have a fascination for the necklaces. Their necks are embellished by many necklaces. Women wear a long chain made of silver around their necks known as *gani* and *haseeri*. They also wear necklaces. One variety of the tribal necklaces has a triangle pendant, studded with a beautiful stone in the centre of it.

It symbolises 'evil eye' and mainly used to avert bad luck. Another type of silver necklace is known as *dodmala*, the one which is made of small pieces of silver together and each piece pointed at the end. Another silver necklace which is very popular among the women of these tribes is *hamel* necklace which is made of coins. The coins are strung on a thread with a heavy pendant. The *jomala* and *hansli* are the other necklaces.



Majority of married women of these twin nomadic tribes have their nose pierced. They put nose pins which are made of silver on their nose. Nose pins come in different sizes which denote whether the girl is married or not. Among few Gujjar older women, nose is pierced from both sides. While the unmarried girls wear a small string of silver, the married ones have their nose decorated with a big silver ring studded with stones or pearls.

The *murki* is another nose ornament, suspended from the centre of the nose which is mostly worn by young girls. Nose pins come in different sizes which denote whether a woman is single or married. The smallest nose-pin known as a *nali* is worn by girls; a slightly bigger nose pin or *teera* is worn by older girls while married women wear large and intricate nose-pins known as *loung*.

These tribal women also tastefully decorate their ears with silver.

Their ears droop with the weight of a dozen *balis* or silver rings with bells. The *jhumkas* also dangle and tinkle. They also wear a fancy silver cap or crown on the head known as *chonk phool* which is a bowl-shaped ornament fastened to the head. The wrists have big weighty silver *karas*.

The Gujjar brides are decorated with silver ornaments like chains, *dolara*, *sargast*, *mahail*, *gani*, earrings, bangles and rings.

Men sometimes wear rings of silver but they usually don't put on heavy jewellery. The typical Gujjar *kameez* or shirt sometimes has silver buttons. Silver beads hooked to the buttons produce a sound. Silver studs called *mogla* are used as cuff links. Silver anklets called as *jhanjra* are worn along with the *anguthra* on a silver ring on the big toe.

All along the traditional nomadic routes of these twin tribes of Gujjar and Bakkarwals, a number of silversmiths have been working since ages who cater to the particular needs of the nomadic people and their traditions. *(IBNS-TWF)*

(The author is a Jammu-based journalist and professor)

Beware of Momo trap

By BK Mishra



CYBER SPACE

If you thought Kiki challenge was dangerous enough, then wait till you've seen this eerie looking girl with bulging eyes doing rounds on WhatsApp, which has been dubbed as the Momo Whatsapp 'suicide game'. A girl's distorted face with protruding eyes and wide mouth appears when you're WhatsApped from a certain number and the game begins.

Remember the Blue Whale challenge that pushed teens to commit suicide through a series of instructions from a stranger over the internet? A similar challenge is apparently making its way in the online space but this time, through the Facebook-owned chat platform WhatsApp. Reports from around the globe are indicating a sculpture's image being spread on WhatsApp along with several challenges that threaten the lives of the receivers. The challenges come in the form of extreme behaviours, just like the ones seen during the Blue Whale challenge. It's called the Momo Challenge.

Parents have yet another reason to be worried about the growing impact of social media on the lives of their young ones. Simply put, driving someone to suicide in the name of a social media challenge has now manifested itself in the name of the Momo challenge. It has been popping up globally over the past few weeks, mostly spread on instant messaging app WhatsApp, and has already claimed its first victim. A 12-year-old girl from Argentina fell in the trap, which culminated with her being challenged to commit suicide. The anonymous senders won, the girl lost. And her family lost too, in the process. But this could just be the start of a terrifying repeat.

In Momo challenge, a disturbing picture of a sculpture is being forwarded along with several instructions for the teens to display extreme behaviour in the form of a challenge.

The sculpture has reportedly been created by a Japanese artist Midori Hayashi and neither the sculpture nor the artist has any relevance to the game. The sculpture of a 'Mother Bird' is on display in Tokyo's Vanilla Gallery, along with other displays of horror art.

Some miscreants made wrong use of this image and have been trying to scare a few people. Do not entertain any such miscreant

'Momo' has accounts on WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube, reports say, which are connected to three numbers in Columbia, Japan and Mexico.

Alleged 'Momo' cases have been reported from the US, France, Germany and Mexico, among others.

IS IT HOAX?

Experts believe the Momo challenge to be a tool for cybercriminals to extract personal data of the victim. It is unclear how widespread the game is and hence is not being considered a real threat directed towards the purpose of inducing suicidal tendencies among the young.

However, cyber experts still advice the young internet users as well as their parents to be on a lookout for such 'absurd' challenges and not fall into their trap.

Momo is connected to at least three phone numbers in Japan, Colombia and Mexico. Someone contacting these numbers is likely 'to be met with insults, implications that this person knows your personal information and most notably disturbing images'.

Some diligence and help of cyber experts reveal that there is no such game as the Momo challenge and that only a picture is being used to steal people's personal information.

An experiment was performed to see if the game was for real. The administrators of the WhatsApp groups from three countries — Japan, Colombia and Mexico was contacted but found the numbers are all inactive.

Children: Teenagers, you need to be more assertive

Whether it be a hoax or an actual suicide 'game', children and teenagers need to be assertive and stand up to peer pressure. Respect others' choices and seek respect for yours.

If you aren't comfortable doing something, suggest something else to do. Don't hang out with people who might be involved in such games. If you sense your friends are in danger, alert adults.

Be honest to your parents.

Parents too have a responsibility. Regulate Social Media use and teach them not to share private details with strangers. Ensure you listen and are sympathetic to their concerns.

Help them practise saying no. Rehearse with them, if need be. Pay close attention to your children behaviour.

Momo is neither a challenge nor a game. It's simply a hoax that should not be given any importance because that can lead to morbid curiosity.

Till now, there have been no reports of the challenge reaching India. However, digital media can spread across the globe like wildfire by just single click. Also, considering that the Blue whale reached the highest risk level in India, it is best to safeguard your kids and have an open conversation with them.

(The author can be contacted at mishrabasant24@yahoo.in)

Dark twist to The Jungle Book

By Sugandha Rawal

Andy Serkis' *Mowgli* will bring the world of Rudyard Kiplings 1864 classic *The Jungle Book* alive on the big screen, splashed with shades of grey — and with a touch of reality and a sense of mystery, says the film's cinematographer Michael Seresin.

The Jungle Book tells the story of an Indian boy named Mowgli, wandering in an enchanting Indian forest with an entourage of his animal friends and fighting for survival. Mowgli's adventures have made way for several adaptations like the popular eponymous 1967 animated film or Jon Favreau's re-imagination with the same name.

But as director, Serkis has adapted a darker theme to narrate his take of the story and has maintained that the audience should not expect singing and dancing animals in the film.



"I saw the final film sometime ago. The film is darker, but is still positive. It is just more realistic with humans and animals. There is a lone wolf and the wolves pack, there is the (fight) between animals in jungle kingdom and human kingdom," Seresin told IANS over the phone from New Zealand.

"Without giving the game away, I can say that it starts on sort of a dark tone and then it lightens up a bit. Then there are shades of grey. If you go from white to black, it probably goes light grey, it goes dark grey and gets pretty dark in the end," he added.

Seresin gave a hint that the film might have an open ending or a climax which will give audiences something to wonder about.

"It still leaves (space) for the audience to use their imagination to try and figure out what happened, which I like because we should have more mystery in our life."

The film features Rohan Chand as Mowgli, Christian Bale as Bagheera, Benedict Cumberbatch as the villainous tiger Shere Khan, Cate Blanchett as the snake Kaa, Naomie Harris as wolf Nisha and Serkis as the wise bear Baloo.

On the human side, Matthew Rhys is Lockwood and Freida Pinto is Messua. Netflix has acquired the movie from Warner Bros and will be releasing sometime next year.

Seresin, who has provided his creative vision by working on projects like Angel Heart, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Dawn of the Planet of the Apes and War for the Planet of the Apes — which will premiere on the Indian small screen on Star Movies on August 15 — had fun creating Indian jungles in South Africa.

"We created the jungles of India in South Africa. It was a relief to go out of the studio because all of a sudden you are dealing with the real thing like creating an Indian village, people, river and weather rather than controlling everything."

But why not shoot the film in India?

"I don't know about things like that... I suspect it was money. To be honest, I am too busy with my job that I just go wherever I am told. I would have been really excited to come and visit your beautiful country.

"We had all Indian actors from Durban. Actually that could be one of the other reasons why it (was not shot in India).... But I don't even get involved in that discussion.

"When I read the script, I said, 'Wow we are going to India', and everybody said yes and then all of a sudden we went to Durban. I think they looked at India as well, and maybe there were some problems that I am not aware of."

Whether Mowgli was shot in India or not, Seresin feels that the film is as 'desi' as it can get.

"I am so happy with the final outcome. It was like being in India anyway. There were more Indians than us. We went to a big catering tent, and there was beautiful Indian food which I was introduced to."

After ending the Mowgli chapter of his life, Seresin might work with Gary Oldman on his Flying Horse, a story of a photographer who helped develop the moving picture.

"Gary has a script with him, and it looks like the next one for me." *(IANS)*

Assam co-op varsity boon for NE students

By Ranjan K Baruah


Google Images

In our last edition, we have published career options related to cooperatives. In this edition, we are publishing more information about the same.

At a time when income inequality is rising around the world, it is good to be reminded that solutions to inequality do exist. The co-operative model is foremost among these solutions since it contains aspects of sustainable development at its core and is based on ethical values and principles.

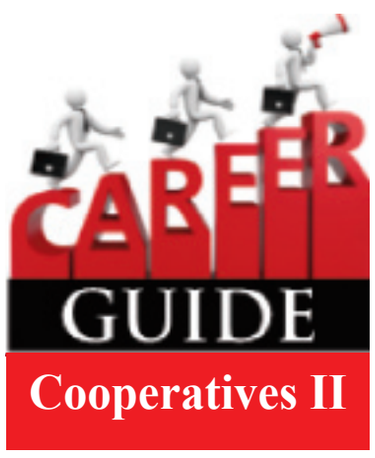
Co-operatives' open membership model affords access to wealth creation and poverty elimination. This results from the co-operative principle of members' economic participation: 'Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative.'

The process of managing and developing co-operative enterprises is considerably different from the management of corporate enterprises or family-owned businesses. Students have to learn a number of subjects like Environment for Co-operatives and Rural Development, Cooperative Credit and Banking, Cooperative Law, Management and Administration, Non-Credit Cooperatives, Cooperative Accounts and Audit, MIS & Computer Application – I, Cost Accounting and Financial Management, Marketing Management, Allied Laws, Organizational Behaviour and Communication, Human Resource Management, Industrial Relations, Statistics, Research Methodology and Project Management, among others.

Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Cooperative Management (ARGUCOM) is the first cooperative management university in the country established in 2010. The university in Sivasagar is residential. It gives the opportunity to enhance skills and managerial capacity, research for searching innovative spheres and to make efforts for all round development of cooperative movement and rural economy.

ARGUCOM is a specialised university and as such its efforts are also innovative and result oriented.

Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management, Pune is a premier management institute for the cooperative sector. The Institute of Cooperative Management, Guwahati, is one of the nineteen Institutes of Cooperative Management in the country and functions under the overall administrative control of National Council for Cooperative Training, New Delhi, being funded by Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India.



Updates:

Korea-India Friendship Essay Competition 2018: All India 6th Korea-India Friendship Essay Competition 2018 invites applications from students of class 6 to 9 to write an essay on the topic 'Why South Korea is my Favorite Country?' in 150 to 300 words and from students of class 10 to 12 to write on 'Why I want to become an Indian Ambassador to South Korea?' in 300 to 500 words.

The senior students can win a free trip to Korea and the junior students can win up to Rs 20000.

This essay writing competition is organized by the Korean Cultural Centre India, Embassy of Republic of Korea. This competition is for Indian students residing in India and students of Classes VI-XII are eligible to enter the contest. Interested students may send their entries before August 17.

MAITS: Mahindra All India Talent Scholarship (MAITS) 2018 invites applications from class 10/12 passed students who have secured admission in a government or other recognised Polytechnic Institute for Diploma Courses in India. This scholarship aims to empower students belonging to the underprivileged section of the society. KC Mahindra Education Trust is offering this scholarship to the students belonging to lower income group families. Each selected student will receive the scholarship of Rs 10,000 per annum for a maximum of three years. Aspirants may apply before August 16.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer and employability coach cum academic consultant and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com)

Re-inventing route to China twin cities

By C K Nayak



There are cities and twin cities but hardly a pair like the juxtaposing Old Dali city and New Dali City in Yunnan province in Southern China, so close to India's North East.

The town contains the historic centre of the county-level city of Dali and is also commonly known as Dali Old Town. The modern centre of Dali City, however, is 10 km south of the old town at Xiaguan.

Being the county seat of Dali City, Xiaguan is often labelled as Dali on maps and is sometimes referred to as Dali New Town to distinguish it from Dali Town. The old town has become well-known as a tourist site thanks to its picturesque location and historic Bai architecture.

Talking to a visiting group of India journalists recently, senior Chinese officials noted that Dali, as the only prefecture of Bai ethnic community in China, has had close and historical links with the people of India mainly of the North East, because of the silk route.

They said China wanted Dali to again become the "bridge head" with India and South Asia. Plans were afoot to give a concrete shape to the proposal.

Historians say the ancient silk route, originating from China's Chengdu city, ran through Myanmar and then extended to India, Bangladesh and even West Asia.

China appears keen to revive the ancient "Southern Silk Road" with South Asia for promoting trade and people-to-people exchanges with India and other South Asian countries.

Talking about the tourism potential of Dali, Xi Ling, Director of Dali Tourism, said much of the economy of Dali was centered around tourism and services catered to travellers. Dali, a place of beneficial ecology, could be an attractive destination for Indian tourists, given its historical links and geographical proximity with India. He said the local authorities were also applying to the Chinese Government for declaring the Dali Airport as an international airport. Xi said tourists could come to Dali any time during the year because of its 'excellent' weather. "Dali is one place where one can see the flowers blossoming around the year,'' he added.

China has developed beyond even imagination all over. But in contrast even while developing, the old town of Dali has been preserved by its ancient walls.

Due to its relatively well-preserved architecture, the town has developed as a major tourist attraction in recent years. Major sites of interest include the Three Pagodas, Dali Museum, the ancient city gates, an artificial town built as the set for Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils, and the Cang Mountain Range to the west besides the Dali university.

Dali Town is located in a depression at the southern end of the Yun Mountains, part of the greater Hengduan Mountains at the southeast edge of the Tibetan Plateau. This depression, an extension of the Red River Fault, is filled by Erhai, a lake that is part of the Mekong Riverbasin. The old town of Dali is located on a plain between Erhai on the east and the Cang Mountains to the west. Dali is well connected with Kunming capital of the Yunnan province. A broad highway runs through the town, eventually connecting with Tibet Autonomous Region in the north and Xishuangbanna in the south.

The nearest train station and airport are both in Xiaguan.

The most memorable was the visit to the old Dali locality. In this city people are rewarded to keep their old pattern Bai houses as it is. The houses are old but maintained well. Even the stone laid roads have not been changed. The star hotel right inside the city is also a heritage hotel where one feels like living in an old village rather than in town even though all the modern facilities are available. The furniture are antique and there are electric lights fixed inside old pattern lanterns.

The place where horseback traders used to meet and auction goods is still intact and so also old places of worship.

The road passing through the old Dali city was once part of legendary Silk Road. The stone topped roads remain same even after decades and it ancient drainage system still works. It has given places to McDonald's and such other western fast food outlets. But old Chinese men and women continue selling food items starting from cottage cheese to local fruits, vegetables and even meat.

Local traditional wares are also on display and sale competing with the branded goods of Europe. The road are traveled by battery operated cars and battery bikes but horses are still used to commute and as beast of burden.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, AUGUST 12, 2018***

Sun is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Pluto denotes a good year. You will get desired results but hard work will also be required. Contacts and communications come in the limelight. A new association can be formed. Business expansion plans can be put into high gear. Family matters will need your attention. An old investment will yield good gains. All things romantic will come to the fore. If any marriage proposal is pending then that will also come through. Children will do exceptionally well. You will come into your own and your self-confidence will rise as will your image and standing.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



This phase will give you wonderful results. A lot of excitement, pleasure, romance is on the cards. You focus on having fun, romance, and expressing yourself creatively. Your romantic affair gives you a big boost of confidence. Moreover your personal magnetism runs high to be admired and adored. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your intuition to feel more integrated. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in authority. You achieve great success in competitive situations. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. Strong chances of finalization of a property related matter. Monetary transactions are beneficial in land related matters.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



This period may put on lot of pressure on you. A positive and creative approach brings gain and resolution in old conflicts and work situations. You need to view professional and business problems from a balanced perspective. Learn from past experience and get on with your life rather than repeat old patterns. Emotive issues can crop up. However later on dust will settle down and you will look up at life with lot of hope. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. You are most likely to express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities are through an intellectual appreciation of art and cultural pursuits. You might make short trips, visiting friends and relatives. It's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, when it comes to matters related to love and romance.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



The planetary configuration promises an excellent phase. You can charm many with your strong personality and soft approach. With inner strength and hard work, you can transform a breakdown at work into a breakthrough. You gain the trust and confidence of people in authority. It's time to let go of obsolete patterns and routines and have a new vision for the future. Your mystical and enigmatic personality attracts some interesting people around you. You will spend on clothes, furniture, and entertainment; the areas of life where you are most likely to express your appreciation of the fine things in life.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



Money and domestic issues will take a centre stage as you grapple with these issues. Your main concentration will be to make domestic relationships and the home environment harmonious and peaceful. You are proud of your ideas, and very good at expressing them with ease. This will enable you to make progress at work. You make face a setback or face some obstacles as far as finances are concerned. This is a time when you need to act with prudence and focus on your priorities. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships. You are more likely to pay closer attention to your physical appearance and mannerisms, aiming to improve and enhance your attractiveness.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



Your courage, confidence will keep your hopes alive. You will need to attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people at work. On the other hand; enhanced energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favors you at this time. Take advantage of this and utilize your energy prudently. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-centeredness. You are highly motivated to make money this enhances much energy for new money-making projects. Romantic matters come to the fore this week and the single will find that they are drawn towards someone in their social circle. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent this week.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



You can look forward to an exciting week. There is increased creative energy within you which provides the necessary dynamism to complete your projects with élan. You might play with various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one source for monetary gain this time however make sure that you read the finer print. However, financial pressure will be there as you spend large sums of money on homemaking, house repairs, re-decorating and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects or social standing. Relationships take on a fun tone now. Friends and lovers take priority for most of the time. Health reads fine.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



Travel, contacts and communications are the keywords. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event in family is celebrated. You are full of hope and enthusiasm as you make new beginnings at work and home. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent during the week. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. You express your feelings to your beloved and will be happy to find that they are reciprocated. Your health or that of someone close will cause some anxious moments.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



An action oriented week keeps you busy. Public relations work, interpersonal relations and other such endeavors are highlighted now. There will be a multitude of tasks for you to handle both at work and at home. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps sway others to your point of view. This is a good time to do some financial planning and strategizing. You will also show aggression in your dealings but make sure that this does not get out of hand. As such, this is a great time to open up conversations about topics such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. Your friends and well wishers would be supportive.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



This is a mixed period for you where you will have to deal with emotional disturbances. There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers now. It is best to go ahead with your work and avoid confrontations or arguments. Think twice before you speak. Financial prosperity or social success may come through your business associate at this time. You are inclined to learn new work skills, or to improve your skills and output in terms of work. Your family and friends will support you and you will find solace in their company. You will be able to enjoy personal relationships with love and affection. Children will bring joy and happiness. Pay attention to your health and do not neglect or overlook minor ailments.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



This is an excellent week where communications, romantic affair and fun activities flourish. You can expect something new at this time. You would be able to make use of your talent and communication skills and impress people around you. This brings some new opportunities. Your career prospects improve as you bring about changes in your work style and interact in more positive way with your colleagues. You make great strides in your career as you win accolades and gain recognition for your work. You may have a desire to decorate your home with good taste and quality. Your charm makes you the center of attraction as you find yourself back on the social whirl. Family life will be very harmonious. Romance is in the air and you enjoy the time spent with your beloved. For the unattached a roaring affair is in the offing.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



New associations will boost your career in a big way. You plan in an unorthodox way and get appreciation from your business associates. At the work place your continuous efforts will bring fruitful results. You have many overseas opportunities to boost your security and comfort. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs. You are likely to travel and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. You may be assigned to complete a task and travel overseas. A lot of travel, meeting with influential people will boost your moral also. Your family also cheers you up and you have a holiday or spend time with them. You extend your hospitality to family and friends.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



A change or betterment in career is strongly indicated this also brings better financial prospects. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers. Let others know they can depend on you. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings new job opportunities or assignments. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Obstacles in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. You get good financial returns from the investments and insurance. Monetary transactions are going to beneficial, you have to research and focus to achieve the desired goals. Romance is very much on the cards. It's time to let your lover know what you want and what has been making you especially happy.

Don't cull them for no reason

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi

The Environment Ministry is increasingly seen as one that understands nothing about the environment, wildlife, water preservation, pollution control. Every vested interest in India has understood this and is trying to take advantage. Every local environmental officer has, by now, lost interest in his duties and takes/gives orders that are bad in law and environment.

The Chief Wildlife Warden of Andaman and Nicobar islands, the man who is supposed to be protecting the wild animals on the islands, has actually written — the first time in India's history that a CWW has done so — to the Ministry of Environment, asking to kill the salt water crocodiles on the grounds that a few tourists have been attacked.

Salt water crocodiles are severely endangered and have been given the highest protection in the Act – Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. This Tarun Coomar wants this protection removed so that he can kill them. One interesting aside is that crocodile skin sells for lakhs. It is smuggled outside the country and sold to make handbags and shoes. Many requests for "culling" have usually got this background and someone is doing business there as well.

Why do I say this? Because the proposal has no basis in science or fact. The Chief Wildlife Warden is lying through his teeth. Records reveal that only 23 attacks by salt water crocodiles have taken place in the last 13 years, and none of them have been in a single place. They are spread out over the vast archipelago. In truth, the tourism industry wants the land to build hotels and take over the beaches. So the LG and the CWW take on the role of " facilitation agents". Even the figures they have given, of the number of Salties, are far more than what actually exist (and that too, without a head count). Field biologists state that the numbers, being published by the administration at Andaman and Nicobar islands, have been falsely stated at 1,700 . There are only about 500 individuals. Are these 500 crocs, spread out and so vital to the survival of the inhabitants of the ocean, going to be killed so hoteliers can destroy the coast?

Here is the proof of " facilitation" . The "Expert Committee" set up by the local administration to find a "solution" to these rare crocodile attacks has no scientific people on it, no field researchers, no environmentalists. But one of the members is the head of the Andaman Association of Tour Operators. This is his statement "The fear has impacted both the tourism and fisheries industries, which are our main source of revenue" said M. Vinod. "Can you imagine a tourist visiting an island destination and not going onto the beach and indulging in water sports?" And if an entire species has to be wiped out so that a tourist can go water skiing, so be it ?

Saltwater crocodiles are millions of years old. They are the largest of all living reptiles and can reach 7 metres in length. They are found in small groups in South-east Asia, Northern Australia. In India they are native to the Sunderbans, Bhitarkarnika in Odisha, and the mangrove forests of the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Before the Act was made in 1972, they were poached for their skin, meat and as trophies. The species was reduced to 31 individuals when the Government of India launched a special conservation effort in 1975 , Project Crocodile, and they were given 'Schedule 1' protection .

While the preservation of the species, in the Andaman and Nicobar islands, is counted as a success story, the fact is that salt water crocodiles have taken decades to even reach these small numbers. It has taken almost 45 years to grow to about 500 animals. Now, if killing takes place (and if my suspicions are right, they will kill 300 and then claim they have killed 30) they will never revive again, because the gene pool is already stretched, they are all related to each other and, as hotels and tourists fill up the beaches, more and more eggs will be lost. The move has attracted international concern. There is a great deal of literature on how to deal with man-crocodile conflict, and wildlife agencies are happy to provide the information – except that the local government doesn't want to know.

This is what can be done to protect humans and salties:

Make a thorough study to conduct a risk assessment in the areas where crocodile-human conflicts have occurred.

Geo-tag the crocodiles to understand, and/or track their movement patterns.

Create safe swimming zones, creating exclusive crocodile zone (wilderness areas where crocodiles take precedence).

Identify rogue crocodiles and put them into captive animal shelters (tourists pay to watch crocodiles as in Australia).

Coexistence zone (where people can be helped with enclosures, fish disposal areas, etc.) and exclusive tourist zone, where there is proper netting for people to swim with regular patrolling and monitoring.

Put up warning signs at crocodile conflict zones.

Raise awareness among local communities, so that they do not see crocodiles as a threat, and secure and monitor tourist bathing areas on a regular basis.

Down-listing the animal under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and removing the safeguards of a Schedule I species, will severely jeopardise the fate of this species across the country, as it could open up the flood gates for other states (like Sundarbans in West Bengal, Bhitarkarnika in Orissa) to seek permission for culling of salt water crocodiles on similar grounds, depending on which crocodile skin traders have moved in, and how much they pay the local officers.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

"Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written."
--- Henry David Thoreau

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Farewell Sir Naipaul

ONE of the "greatest" writers of the past century passed away with the same quietude that he lived, far from the madding crowd, but leaving behind a great literary legacy that India too can truly be proud of. Trinidad-born Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was of mixed identity. His parents were Indians but he is described as a British author. This, because he lived and worked for the most part in and around London, having arrived there from Trinidad in 1950 to study English Literature at Oxford. He retained his love for India, wrote extensively on India and on the Asian region and even shouldered the "blame" of being a proponent of Hindutva. But Naipaul was also sharply critical of religion and what he found wrong with this country too. He sure had a way with words. From abject poverty, Naipaul rose from the ghetto to this great stature. His ancestors were among the "bonded labourers" the colonialists shipped from India to Trinidad to work there. He started writing and courting fame from the initial years in London as a student, and showed the courage to call a spade a spade. He called India even after its Independence as a "slave society", provoked anger by teasing that the coloured dot that Indian women wore on their forehead meant indicated an empty head.

He earned the wrath of the Blacks for creating an impression that he was the mouthpiece for Whites who suppressed and repressed them. He was uncomfortable with religion, per se, and wrote about Islamic radicalism much before it surfaced openly. This showed his connect with the ground realities with a finger on thepulse of society. Yet, he laughingly saw the 1989 Islamic fatwa against author Salman Rushdie as nothing more than an "extreme form of literary criticism." Rushdie, on his part, saw in Naipaul's writing shades of Hindu fundamentalism. Naipaul's own life and times are vividly reflected in his writings, starting with his first novel The Mystic Masseur, a humourous story on the life of depravity in the Trinidad ghettos; 'The House of Mr Biswas,' a commentary on colonial societies in which his father is the central character; and, 'A Bend in the River,' seen as a defence of colonial rule in Africa, from the eyes of an Indian Muslim settler. Having written over 30 fiction and non-fiction works, including travelogues he was the worthy recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 and a fitting tribute to his outstanding contributions as a litterateur of renown. His demise at 85 leaves a deep void in English Literature.

The Making of U Kiang Nangbah

By H H Mohrmen

Winter is always cold and dry and the colour of the rolling hills turns brownish because the grass on the hills has withered due to the frost. Everything looks dull because the trees have shed their leaves and the chirping of the birds has also fallen silent. All around the earth looks dull and dry; but winter is only a preparation for the onset of spring. Winter may be associated with cold and dreariness but it is also pregnant with hope for the new day; the new year; the new spring which will rejuvenate the earth once again. The cycle of the seasons with all that is going around is the magic of the nature that plays out before us.

Like the dreary winter, the period before U Kiang Nangbah rose to prominence was crucial because though it was a very difficult time for the inhabitants of the Jaiñtia kingdom, yet it was an important juncture in their history. It was a difficult time for them because their King had just been defeated and the entire territory of the kingdom was annexed to the British Empire. But like a seed buried in the ground, it was just waiting for the right moment to burst from its shell and rise above the ground.

Jowai was then a small hamlet comprising of the localities we now call Pohchnong. The said area would comprise of five or six localities at the most. The locality we now know as Pohskur or Mission compound came up only after the Missionaries arrived and settled in the area, hence the name Pohskur or Mission compound which obviously means the place where Christians live which also distinguishes it from where the non-Christians resided.

The section from Mission Compound onwards was then the outskirts of the town where some portion of the area was and is still being used as a cremation ground or the place where the different clans' ossuary are located. It was then a common practice that cremation grounds or clan ossuary were located away from the residential areas of the village.

The fact that the British government built the office of the Sub Divisional Officer of the Jowai Sub Division and the Police Station at the Iawmusiang area also confirms the fact that the area was then in the outskirts or far from the public settlements. At Iongpiah there is place called Iaw-Iongpiah which was the centre of Jowai till the Iawmusiang Market was established in its present location. It may also be mentioned that now there are two types of local markets in Jaiñtia hills; ïawniam and ïaw District Council or local market. Ïawniam are those managed by the raid and the particular market has religious significance while other markets are managed by the community under the supervision of the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council.

In Nangbah village till date there is a locality called Iawmusiang where there are huge collections of monoliths. The story goes that Ïawmusiang market was originally located at Nangbah village but at some point of time it was shifted to Jowai. The Daloi of eleka Nangbah would occasionally offer sacrifice and pay obeisance to the gods of the Iawmusiang market, but the Iawmusiang in Jowai is not a religious market because no ritual is performed for the market's sake except for the Kbai Mooknor which is traditionally an announcement held every year about the ensuing Behdieñkhlam festival of the Raid Jwai.

The people who live in Jaiñtia hills then were predominantly Pnars who lived on the northern part of the state and on the southern slopes towards the plains the area was occupied by the War people or the War- Jaintia. But at the time when the Jowai Subdivision was established by the British; it also catered to the needs of the Bhoi or the Karbi people of the then Mikir hills. Apart from the office of the Sub Divisional Officer; the first Police Station was also located adjacent to the SDO's office.

Politically it was just about a decade since the Jaintia King was defeated by the British and the land was annexed to the Kingdom. With the removal of the Jaiñtia King from his office by the British the majority of Dalois (chieftains) were also treated as agents of the foreign government. They then became a sort of mechanism to only help or assist in the execution the order of their new masters.

Prior to the Jaintia kingdom was a flourishing one with its border extending from Jaintiapur in the South to Cachar in the North. The Jaintia kings even minted their own coins, which are now on displayed at the Museum in Kolkata. Perhaps of all the Khasi and Jaiñtia monarchies, there are records of only the Jaiñtia king who issued his own coins. Not only trade with the other communities flourished during the reign of the Jaiñtia Kings but they were also better equipped to defend themselves in terms of military might. The canons which can be found at the Shiva temple in Nartiang and few at the Museum in the State Central Library, Shillong are classic examples of the military might of the King during the glorious days of the Jaintia Kings.

After the Jaiñtia King was vanquished, the then British government promised to pay him a pension and he continued to stay in the plains. Although the British had annexed the land and removed the King from his office, they retained the office of the Dalois for their own vested interest. The office of the Daloi remained the liaison between the government and the public. After the fall of the King, the different elekas also entered into a conflict with each other; there were stories of one eleka fighting against the other or one raid against another and even one village against the other. It is therefore safe to say that before the rise of u Kiang Nangbah, there was no unity amongst the Pnars and the British exploited this fissure in the community to the hilt.

We have stories of eleka Nangjngi fighting against the people of eleka Nartiang and Shangpung against Raliang and even village like Nongtalang fought a hard long battle with the Padu and the animosity continued till Padu decided to become part of eleka Jowai, in spite of the fact that they are much closer to the Nongtalang in terms of the language they spoke and the culture and tradition they followed. This was the prevailing situation in the Kingdom before u Kiang Nangbah took the mantle to lead the revolt against the foreign rule.

People were farmers and the major crop of the area was rice. Unlike the War people who continue with their jhum cultivation, the Pnars in the North had advanced to wetland cultivation. The lives of the Pnar farmers revolved around rice farming and their religion was closely interlinked with the community because there was only one religion then. Even their festivals and celebrations were dictated by the different seasons which also went hand in hand with their farming practices. And since rice was a major crop it also had huge influence on people's lives.

The importance of rice is evident from the fact that they used rice for everything from, staple food, to making rice beer, different snacks and we will see later how rice has so much connection with the revolt of the Jaiñtias against the might of the British.

U Kiang was a young boy when the Jaintia Kingdom was annexed to the British Empire and Ksan Sajar Nangbah his maternal uncle was at the forefront in the first Jaiñtia rebellion against the British. The young boy was so moved to hear from his mother the story of how Ksan his maternal uncle fought against the British soldiers and which led to the defeat of the Jaintias in the hands of the foreign invaders. The revolt not only went in vain because they had lost to the British, but it was also a great humiliation that they had to bow down to foreign rule.

The period before the revolt had all the necessary elements to produce a leader like u Kiang Nangbah; a man who used his sword with the swiftness of the tiger or u Khla Ka Wait.

It is in this context that we have to examine past history without forgetting the downsides that go to produce real heroes. In fact heroes are born in testing times because a life without challenges pushes people to complacency and to a comfort zone. Heroes are only born in periods of strife.

Khasi adjudication on matrilineality is divinely ordered

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Much has been written and spoken about the amendment to the Lineage Bill passed recently by the KHADC but the core controversy has not been adequately addressed. The attempt to prevent the exploitation of Khasi women by non-Khasi men through cross-cultural marriages is being contended by the fact that it demeans the social customs of matriliny. These two things are the underlying threat to our culture as well as identity. Firstly, As a tribe we have absolute rights granted by the Constitution under the Sixth Schedule to protect and preserve the cultural identity and also to regulate marriages within the tribe. Not only this, but it is also a fundamental right to protect our interests under Article 29. Secondly, to exonerate women who married from outside the tribe is also a violation to their ancestral, personal and traditional right.

In view of these clashes we need therefore to further introspect on the issue. The KHADC has a clear answer as to why it has legislated such amendment. It is to prevent our women from getting married outside the tribe. But if we do a reality check as to why our women have to cross the social boundaries to entrust themselves to strangers called non- Khasis requires in-depth research. By simply saying that our women are freelancers with absolute freedom is unethical because we might have forgotten about their intrinsic nature of dependency. As far as cross-cultural relationship is concerned, the intention of KHADC is clear in this regard, while the intention of those women who married outside the tribe is naturally for the sake of companionship. But the intention of non- Khasi husbands as claimed by KHADC is purely for economic exploitation. It may be a fact in many cases, but in some cases such claim is not true because there are non- Khasi fathers and husband who are better than any Khasi gentleman in terms of raising their children decently. But there are also cases of Khasi women who married non-Khasis and have regretted later because of the exploitation they suffered. The clashes of these intentions are not yet addressed properly to the full satisfaction of everyone. If the Bill in its present form fails to cater and rehabilitate those who have been exploited but willing to return to their original culture, then a great blunder of deprivation may have been committed simply by ignoring the authentication process.

Perhaps as a tribe (Jaitbynriew) we have forgotten about our roots so let me remind here on the role that each individual person has been assigned by our ancestors. In my previous article a couple of year ago I had mentioned that traditionally in our indigenous society when a person is born to this world certain practices were carried out during the christening ceremony which is symbolical in defining the personality of an individual. For a female child, the materials that were assigned are 'ka khoh u star' (khasi cone & crafted bamboo rope). This symbolizes that the woman is destined to don the role of caretaker and custodian of ancestral property and resources. In return she will also have to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the parents and other family members when they are old or during difficult situations. Meanwhile the three arrows that were symbolically assigned to a male child signify the three protective roles destined for every man to fulfill. First of all he is expected to protect his own life and personality not only from physical harm but from various forms of self-destruction and dehumanization. Secondly, he is also expected to protect and defend his own family and clan from hardships and difficulties that threaten their existence and well being in life. Thirdly, he is expected to become a soldier or warrior for the entire community and tribe in times of need. If every Khasi can assimilate these basic principles then we can successfully manage our community and society better.

What our forefathers have done hundreds or thousands of years back when they have not even heard about Christ and Christian principles, and their action and adjudication in defining gender is absolutely in alignment with the Bible or the Word of God. In Genesis 2:24 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Here it clearly says that a man leaves his family and comes to a woman's habitat. Further, in Ephesian 5:25 "For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her." Here again comes the protective role of men and what women need in general is care, love and protection which has been grossly violated and forgotten. Interestingly, in 1 Peter 3:7 the Bible refers to women as a weaker vessel that has also been regarded in our culture as 'shi buit, shi bor' (lesser in wisdom and strength) in comparison to the 'khat -ar bor' (superior by 12 times in strength) for men. Ieid ri or jaitbynriew (patriotism) is meaningful only when all the three roles symbolized by these arrows are fulfilled.

The chronic disease that affects our society is broken homes and families. This is rampant in rural areas and among the illiterate. And because of this loophole others may take undue advantage. Reasons for this are numerous but one thing is sure; the society as a whole lacks proper knowledge on sexual relationship or sex education (not exactly birth control). As relationship in our society is based on love, sex education is vital in order to achieve planned parenthood. Further, pre and post marital sex education can be of great help for healthy home and families. This pathetic situation in rural areas requires immediate attention. The roots of social chronics are plenty and we can continue to dig out one by one and this will help us to address the issue correctly.

I strongly believe that there can be various alternatives to supplement the move of KHADC in preventing economic exploitation of women by non-Khasi men but not necessarily by castigating women who marry outside the tribe. And these alternatives can be judiciously engineered and designed by the KHADC with the help of right thinking intellectuals that will ultimately satisfy the motives and initiative of the KHADC in preventing exploitation of women by non-Khasi men and to further conserve the sanctity of our identity. To be precise, our identity is not in the blood but in the culture we adopt and the language we speak and communicate with one another. However, identifying lineage and identity through DNA linkages is another silly attempt because DNA sequencing and mapping might indicate and point a connection with a common ancestor or a 'mitochondrial Eve' as one geneticist opined. The only historical record available on how different nations and tribes are created on the surface of the earth is the Tower of Babel. This divine intervention of the Tower of Babel is significant in the context of cultural and ethnic identity. Therefore, we must accept this reality that the growth of humanity is no longer from a single race but from different tribes and tongues. Smaller tribes need to protect themselves from being assimilated or they might disappear in course of time.

TO THE EDITOR

Williamnagar Traffic Police looting public

Editor,

Is section 177 of the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act applicable whenever the traffic police feel like imposing it? Or do they enforce it whenever they need money? Is this Act just for a single day? I have been living here in Williamnagar for many years and have seen this arbitrary system being perpetuated. Traffic police allow drivers of two wheeler to ply without helmets for months on end and then and suddenly on a weekly market day or any day they feel like checking and imposing fines on two wheelers they make them all line up. Poor people come from long distances to Williamnagar for the weekly market have to part with fines out of their hard-earned money for not wearing helmets. And why should they when the Traffic branch is not making it compulsory on other days or for months on end and suddenly stops them and fines them one fine day? Why not enforce the Act every day and fine those who don't wear helmets on a regular basis so that all learn to obey the law?

It's a totally senseless act on the part of the Traffic department because I have seen many violators riding right in front of them without any action being taken. Do they wait for the market day knowing that there will be more scope of making money on this day since many more people will be riding their motor cycles/scooters without helmets? This is blatant corruption.

On August 11, I saw the officer in-charge Traffic in a drunken state while imposing fines. He was stinking of alcohol. Ask any Williamnagar rider and he will narrate the drama played by the Traffic police. I appeal to the higher authorities to take stock of matters and do something to end this charade. Please enforce the MV Act every day as is done in Shillong and Tura and not in fits and starts. I have video-graphed this altercation between the Traffic police and motor bike riders in case I need to prove my point.

Yours etc.,
P. Shadap
Williamnagar

Indigenous peoples are owners of forests

Editor,

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated every year on August 9. This day is significant because it reminds us about the necessity to recognize the rights of the Adivasi (Indigenous) Peoples to their traditional lands, territories and resources. This is a crying need not only for the sake of justice ~ of returning to the real owners their properties but also for the friendly ecosystem which is a must for the survival of both forests and forest peoples. India has passed an excellent piece of legislation in the form of Forest Rights Act, 2006. Previously, millions of Adivasis had no legal rights whatsoever to their homes, lands or livelihoods. It was the government officials who enjoyed all the powers including legal privileges resulting in deaths and destructions of both forests and forest dwellers.

Unfortunately, Indian forest dwellers have been witnessing torture, bonded labour, extortion of money, rapes, harassment and eviction of millions of Adivasis on the pretext of being intruders in their own homes since the British legislation of Indian Forest Act, 1927. The fact of the matter is that the Indian Forest Act, 1927 was made only to serve the British need to extract timber. The Wild Life Prevention Act, 1972 followed somewhat the same model.

These forest laws destroyed all the community management and regulations that had existed before, forced tribals to either leave the forest and those who live there are treated as criminals. Ironically, it was a criminal offence to plant a tree in a reserved forest but it was perfectly legal for the forest department to destroy the entire forest! At present, India needs to speedily implement the 2006 Forest Rights Act and do what China has done. China has given direct rights of over 100m hectares of forest area to its traditional inhabitants, which helped it reduce poverty and protect environment.

In our country, community rights have been recognised only in less than three per cent of the forest area. However, in those areas, it has been seen that making traditional inhabitants managers of their forest land not only improves their lives but also enhances the environment. It is high time we implemented the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in the remaining 97 per cent of the forest area.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Peace in the sub-continent

Editor,

This refers to the recent statement of 'The Dalai Lama' that India and Pakistan were divided because Nehru didn't relinquish his desire to become the PM of India to Jinnah, even though Mahatma Gandhi advised him to do so. It is an established fact that the partition of India was the result of extreme narrow divisive politics of the Muslim League on the one side and RSS and Hindu Mahasabha on the other. Majority of the people on both sides of the border were totally averse and somewhat unaware of the divisive politics being played by their leaders. Even after seven decades of partition, people of both the countries still have to bear its consequences. Animosity and mistrust for each other still loom large over the minds of people in both the countries. It's time we realise the blunders committed by our forefathers and try to rectify them by evolving into two friendly and mutually cooperative Nations and thereby usher an era of peace and prosperity in the subcontinent.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H.Laskar,
Guwahati.

"True independence and freedom can only exist in doing what's right."

-- Brigham Young

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.5 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2018

Exit Karunanidhi

TAMIL Nadu is in a state of shock. The demise of Muthuvel Karunanidhi on Tuesday at the age of 94 sent tremors down to every nook and corner of the state. He was such a reigning presence for more than half a century in the state politics. But, that shock was only amplified by the last punch that the rival AIADMK and its chief minister sought to inflict on the veteran leader who rode like a colossus on the essentially pro-Dravidian political scene. By refusing to grant a space on Marina Beach to bury the body, a favour that was extended to other top leaders in the state in the past, the Palaniswami government has only proven its penchant for dirty politics even in such a sad situation.

Tamil Nadu has been passing through difficult and politically volatile times after the demise of another legendary leader J Jayalalithaa in December 2016. She, like Karunanidhi, had reigned supreme in state politics for decades. Her political establishment, the AIADMK, is now facing challenges and the governance of the state by a new generation of AIADMK leaders leaves much to be desired. Some of them are steeped in corruption. The DMK, spearheaded by Karunanidhi and later by his son, too is under a cloud vis-a-vis corruption of a high order as in the 2G scam and several other deals. However, the two parties that alternated in power in the state since the 1960s also helped in pushing growth. That ear of growth is now arrested, thanks largely to the uncouth behavior, greed, lack of maturity and lack of vision of the new generation leaders. This is amply proven by the reckless actions of CM Palanisamy and his flock as in the denial of permission to bury Karunanidhi on Marina Beach - a decision that the Madras High Court has reversed.

The pro-Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu might retain its strength for some time, if only because of the strong foundations built by Karunanidhi, or former CMs like MG Ramachandran or Annadurai, over the years. National parties have little relevance there, and both the Congress and the BJP are playing minor roles in the state. The trust of the people in the AIADMK, in particular, is on the wane ever since the demise of Jayalalitha. The party is split into parts, and there is no central figure that it could bank on now. The DMK, under MK Stalin, might still survive odds, if present trends are any indication.

NRC Conundrum

What is the way out?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The politics over the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam is turning into a hot potato. While the media is rightly focussing on it, there is confusion and nagging apprehension of what is to follow. The Supreme Court too is peeved for its two court-appointed officers --Assam State coordinator and Registrar General of India are only adding to the conundrum.

Recently, it pulled up the officers for stating to the media "documents, which were earlier not accepted, would now be accepted at the stage of claims and objections and persons who raise this will be given extensive and numerous hearings." This is beyond their brief as the apex court is yet to hear from the Central government about its standard operating procedure (SOP) on claims and objections. Thus, they were barred from speaking to the press.

But, who will rein in our political leaders, whose statements are only adding to the nagging fear of the 40 lakh people left out of the NRC? The safety and security of the people staying in a country cannot and should not be denied. Though it is believed that a large part of Assam's 3.3 crore population may comprise what is being termed "illegal immigrants" coming from Bangladesh, can these migrants be pushed back after staying in the State for over two or three decades?

Political analysts have started wondering the real intention behind such a move. Moreover, it is understood that the Central government is fore-warning of a similar Register at the national level, but saying that Indian citizens would not impacted. On its part, the Opposition sees it as yet another issue to take on the Modi government. Recently, 11 political parties, including the Congress, submitted a joint memorandum to the President seeking his intervention.

Though the question of migration from neighbouring Bangladesh is well known, the governments of this country - whether at the Centre or at the State -- has allowed this and no strict action has been taken in this regard. Electoral considerations may have encouraged this to happen. Ironically, it is the Congress, that signed the onerous Assam accord in 1985, remained indifferent to such migration. But the migration was due to factors such as communal tension i.e. torture on Hindus in Bangladesh, poverty and lack of opportunities of the minority community there to earn a decent livelihood.

However, at this juncture implementing the accord may be quite inhuman. The most-affected would obviously be Bengalis, whether belonging to Hindu or Muslim community, and for this West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is protesting vehemently by warning of a 'civil war' taking place if the NRC was not rectified. Experts say even if 20 lakh residents are accommodated in the revised NRC, what will happen to the remaining half?

The present problem poses a challenge before the government as this involves not just questions pertaining to human rights but relations with Bangladesh.

Assam was a part of undivided Bengal before partition and lakhs of Bengali population have been residing in that State for generations. Thus, the draft NRC, where names of thousands or lakhs of people have been omitted appears no doubt discriminatory and against the basic norms of human rights, as per the United Nations guidelines. What will the international community view this matter as reports reveal that 4.5 lakh Indians have taken the citizenship with firms that facilitate "citizenship by investment", reporting a 40 per cent increase in applicants?

In the name of nationalism, sovereignty and protecting the rights of Assam people, the exercise is undoubtedly arbitrary and smacks of political agenda and religious bias. Where would Bengali Muslims who have come from Bangladesh go for no fault of theirs? Moreover, if other States follow the Assamese example, there would be large scale displacements, leading to chaos and civil instability, which is most unhealthy for our country.

The religion of a community should not be any consideration "illegal migrants" as they may have been staying in the State since say 1980 or 1985 or even later. The cut-off date, as suggested by many commentators, should have been revised at this point of time and brought forward to say 1990 or any date around that time.

The NDA government's anti-secular policies have created lot of controversies over the past few years as they want to promote Hindutva in an aggressive manner to cash in on the Hindu vote bank. But for this, some of the actions towards the minority community go against the basic principles of human rights. This has also come to the notice of the international media and there is much criticism. The migration problem in Assam cannot be treated in isolation as this has happened in Bengal, Tripura, Punjab and Kashmir but there is no such problem there.

By taking a firm and clear stand, the BJP wants to live up to its reputation of being a tough party that is headed by a decisive leader, who is not afraid of taking difficult decisions. Coming at a time when the Modi government has been in the firing line over the poor state of the economy, the agrarian crisis, growing unemployment and the Rafale deal, the publication of the citizens' list in distant Assam has provided an opportunity to the BJP to change the national political discourse and return to its communal agenda.

The BJP apparently is worried that Muslims constituted over 34 per cent of Assam population in 2011 - and may now be anything above 36 per cent - up from 30 per cent in 2001 and have become a majority in some border districts. However, one cannot ignore communities fearful of being overwhelmed and converted by immigrants, obviously from Bangladesh.

It is thus necessary to read the NRC alongside the pending Citizenship Amendment Bill which offers fast-track citizenship to people belonging to six religions - excluding only Muslims - from three countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, on the ground that they are minorities in their own countries.

Further, if the so-called illegal migrants cannot be given citizenship, they may be given green card equivalents and allowed to stay and work in Assam as before. Their right to livelihood should not be taken away. It is thus the duty of the Centre to settle the matter judiciously.

The present problem poses a challenge before the government as this involves not just questions pertaining to human rights but relations with Bangladesh. Pushing back residents to that country is not easy and these may have to be allowed to stay on. An option would be to settle them in States where population density is low and where there is scarcity of farm labour. It should not be forgotten that India is country with diverse communities and religions and all of them have equal rights to citizenship.

Keeping in view the fact that the tradition and heritage of our country focuses on brotherhood and fellowship - which are key tenets of Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and even Islam - the present leadership should not do anything to disturb our present status. Thus, the question of migrants has to be tackled with care. Political parties must put aside their vote bank politics and think and act in the larger interest of the nation.---INFA

Our charter for Independence day

There must be an 'ease of living index'

By Anjan Roy

Perchance I were the Prime Minister of India, or failing in that ambitious aim, I were entrusted with the responsibility of conceptualising the speech of the Prime Minister of India this Independence Day, what should it have been.

Let us begin with a negative list. For a long time now, since 1991-92, we have been talking as a nation too much about reforms, that is, economic reforms. Remember the last or one before that speech of the prime minister from Red Fort ramparts: it spoke of the much vaunted "Make In India", or bank accounts for all.

What happened to "Make in India". It appears this is still hanging in the air, without India making much. If anything, we are getting more of electric kettles, hair dryers, light bulbs, machinery from China. Even common umbrellas are now coming in from across the Himalayas to protect us from rain and the sun. And during the good times, Diwali lights are now apparently a monopoly of Chinese manufacturers.

Then remember the last two pieces of economic reforms. One turned out to be a disaster and the other disruptive. Demonetisation, announced as it was one evening, took the nation by surprise. As a criticism many had pointed out that even the then governor of RBI and senior officials of financial ministry, and even the Union finance minister did not have an inkling of it. As if, the measure should have been announced one month before the effective date and allowed everyone to manage their affairs well in time. But then, it was meant to be sudden and it did a thorough job.

In the immediate aftermath of that piece of reform, nobody actually knew what to do, how it had hit. But for those for whom it was meant were hardly naïve enough to hold large value cash. For those for whom it was not meant, the common man, it was a thorough nuisance - getting to the bank and exchange old notes. It wasn't, as they say, worth a dime.

And for those for whom all governments all the time shed their crocodile tears, the really poor and casual workers in the informal sectors, it had meant being for some time left without any jobs. Most small and tiny units had to down shutters for a while and workers had to migrate to their native villages.

As for the Midnight Session and introduction of second freedom for the country, GST is still creating hurdles of adjustment. The ill-devised implementation IT backbone had proved to be a no-brainer and its fine tuning is still apparently being done. Requirements of innumerable returns at the shortest possible cycles for even the smallest businesses had set in a disruption motion that is yet to be over.

So a Prime Minister's speech should not remind any of these bad memories by even remotely giving references to reforms. The exports of joy that even senior ministers went over India gaining notches in the World Bank "Ease of Doing Business" report card should give way to something else. And no oblique references to be made to resemble the "India Shining" claim.

Instead let us have a speech talking of "Ease of Living in India".

Consider what a picture we were having of the experience of living in India. Women are unsafe anywhere in the country, where we are all beseeching by the chant of "Bharat Mata ki Jai". Mob lynching is the order of the day, for anything from allegations of child lifting to cow transportation.

The Supreme Court had to warn and tell the government of the day to ensure law and order. It is as if all these incidents are a responsibility of the government at the centre, when the states are simply as if sleeping. As this rate, we should announce on Independence Day creation of the unitary state than a federation to have an identifiable agency for holding it to book for flagrant lapses in maintaining law and order.

The Prime Minister should then tell us on Independence Day that his government is adopting just a Five-Point Programme (FPP) for ensuring "Ease of Living in India" (ELI) for the common man, the first minimalist point is to fully protect the citizen from hooligans of political parties to local mafias by entrusting law and order to every district administration. The backbone for a nationwide network of district magistrates into a grid already exists, which can be used for this purpose, holding that authorities responsible for any infringement. Law and order should be the first priority throughout the country.

The next issue to tackle should be to reach safe drinking water to every home, not just to villages by setting up a water management machinery throughout the country. Reports are indicating that we are running dry of even underground water and water tables are falling disastrously fast in parts of India, including wide swathes of north India. The matter would gain greater urgency as climate change is upon us and its manifestations could be seen across the world. An entire province in Australia is drought-affected and Europe is getting baked under a heat wave. Wild fires in California have reached proportions never experienced before. The monsoon has so far protected us from such catastrophes. But we must be careful.Health should be next on the agenda and the government must ensure that healthcare should be available to all citizens, irrespective of their means. The skyrocketing price of private healthcare is driving even the middle class from getting quality care from reliable doctors and establishments, let alone the poor. Health costs as a matter of act can drive a relatively comfortable middle class family into poverty, given the current prices. The conflict between costs and required care needs to be resolved for the population as a whole. Talk seriously about that, Mr Prime Minister.

Farms and farmers cannot be ignored. They are committing suicide, which have become so sadly an annual litany. All that has been done in response is to waive farm loans, to be followed by next round of self-sacrifice. So something endemically wrong. Government is announcing higher MSPs every year, but had these been really implemented it is difficult to see why suicides should have recurred. There are restrictions on farmers' freedom, which are made merry of by others. A farmer cannot send his produce outside his state, even if there is a local glut.

Additionally, there is not enough of agro-infrastructure for storage and transportation. So, the government should first give DBT to farmers when prices are below MSPs straight into their bank accounts, now that claims have been established about their accounts with banks. Secondly, all the restrictions on farmers' freedom should be removed.

(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Why not do Ancestry DNA Forensic?

Editor,

The debate about the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill has become very engaging. The myriad of legal, constitutional, customary, moral, practical, biological and anthropological implications and ramifications of the Bill have already received enormous commentary and attention. We are moreover also in this age of rapid transformation in our lifestyles influenced and shaped by science and technology which I suppose the respected 29 members of the KHADC are also enjoying. My fervent appeal to the learned authors and promoters of this Bill is why not also seek the help of modern technology to determine who is a 100% blue blooded Khasi? The test can be done through DNA Forensics Laboratory , 44F/9 , 2nd Floor , Rajendra Complex, Kishangarh , Sector - A, Vasant Kunj , New Delhi - 110070 ; Email:info@dnaforensics.in; www.dnaforensics.in ; Tel: 9289867771/ 8010177771. The test will actually be conducted in the US and will take about three weeks. One test costs Rs. 15,000. The Sample Collection Kit costs Rs.1500. I got one when I visited the DNA Forensics Laboratory , recently. I thought I could present it to the respected Chief Executive Member of KHADC if he is willing to go through the process. All the 29 members of the KHADC can also vote on a budget to undergo the process of determining their 100% Khasi blue blood. Proof of a 100% Khasi DNA gene means empowering them even more to be enthroned as the Saviours of the Khasi tribe and community.

I am a diplomat who has represented India abroad in different capacities including as Ambassador and also served in Delhi. I am inter-generationally of mixed blood but my identity as a Khasi has been nothing else but prominent. That made several of our fellow Khasis including ministers, politicians and leading business persons to approach me for all kinds of help. More significantly, a non-Khasi colleague of mine married to a Khasi lady went out his way to use his position as Ambassador of India to the UN in Geneva to promote an acclaimed celebrity Khasi fashion designer in organizing a very successful exhibition of Khasi costumes and attire in Geneva . Does anyone in the KHADC even have any idea how to promote Khasi costumes and attires in Delhi, leave alone in Geneva?

The Bill also contains elements of the Eugenics project of Nazi Germany under Hitler which is very dangerous and pernicious. So respected 29 KHADC members please do some heart and soul-searching introspection and study, lest you cut the nose to spite the face !

Yours etc.,
Rudi Warjri
Via email

Of internet games

Editor,

The article "Beware of Momo Challenge" is a timely written article by B.K.Mishra. The article depicts the dangers of this online Game, especially in this fast changing internet world where we are just a click away. In our country we have seen how fast such games penetrate into our society. It becomes more dangerous when Indians are the fastest growing users of WhatsApp. We have seen the effects of the Blue Whale game in our country where young lives have been cut short. Hope this timely article will caution the parents as also the youth and they will be extra diligent about not falling into this trap. Mishra's writing has made the citizens more aware of the various cyber crimes. Hope he continuous doing so for the benefit of the citizens, especially the youth.

Yours etc.,
Ricky Wallang,
Via email

How Meghalaya missed the CAU !

Editor,

On Aug 2, last our Agriculture Minister, Banteidor Lyngdoh gave full vented his grievance against the Union Ministry of Agriculture while speaking to the reporters in Shillong on the non-setting up of the proposed Central Agricultural University (CAU) at Kyrdem Kulai, Ri Bhoi district. In this interaction with the media, the Minister averred that at the request initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture in the Department of Agricultural Research& Education (DARE), a piece of land measuring 226.37 acres was handed over by Meghalaya Govt. to the Vice Chancellor of CAU, Imphal for establishing the Agriculture Varsity. Oddly, such generous gift of prime land at Ri Bhoi was purportedly not matched with any reciprocation from the powers that be since 2014, as reiterated by the Minister in question. In this context I would beg to differ that the said land which measured 226.37 acres was in fact 200 acres instead, as the residual space of 26.37 acres was allotted to the Directorate of Horticulture for establishing the much needed Apex Training Centre for the beneficiaries. Incidentally, this stretch of land was offered free of cost as per Memorandum of Transfer (MOT).

It may be recalled that on the fore-going issue I had, in fact, broached in these very columns over a year ago where I had indicated that it was way back in 2003 that Meghalaya was first offered, among others in the Region, to explore means of establishing such a farm varsity. Sadly, however, it was due to lack of motivation and lackadaisical approach of our key political leaders and administrators that led to our state being deprived of the benefit of having such an enviable institute which could have gone miles not only in imparting farm education but also solving the unemployment problems of a vast army of youths along the lines of the existing health institute - NEIGRIHMS and for good measure ensure the socio-economic benefits of local farmers.

Markedly, having seen the dilly-dallying and couldn't care less attitude of Meghalaya, the CM of Arunachal Pradesh Pema Khandu approached the Union Minister of State for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Sadarshan Bhagat to impress upon the latter that Arunachal Pradesh was very anxious to provide suitable spacious land for instituting a Central Agriculture University. In a word, it therefore appears that Meghalaya, through its Agriculture Minister is now crying over spilt milk!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Via email

Deficit school teachers in dire straits

Editor,

The High Court of Meghalaya has shown respect to the deficit teachers of Meghalaya by directing the State Government to come up with a clear cut affidavit as to whether they are going to give pension and other benefits to the deficit school teachers as per the recommendations of the fifth pay panel within three weeks. (as published in your esteemed daily on 4th August). In this connection, let me remind the Chief Minister that after a long struggle by the Khasi Jaintia Deficit School Teachers' Association', it was the Purno Sangma ministry that sanctioned the present pay structure to the deficit school teachers of Meghalaya w.e.f January 1, 1987 and that the Ministry also assured the deficit school teachers that pension and other benefits would be sanctioned in the next pay panel. But now more than 30 years have passed by but no Government has respected this assurance given to the teachers.

In fact, deficit school teachers are shouldering the maximum load of providing education to the maximum number of students in Meghalaya as the number of government schools are few and far between. It is an irony that deficit school teachers are severely deprived of their old age security and forced to live a painful life after retirement. Is this the reward that society gives to the deficit school teachers?

I urge to the present ministry and the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya to pursue this matter and give justice by sanctioning pension benefit for old age security to the deficit school teachers of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Reeta Ghosh (National Awardee Teacher),
Shillong-4

"One individual may die for an idea, but that idea will, after his death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives"

-- Subhash Chandra Bose

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.6 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2018

Democracy and Freedom

AS India observes yet another year of Independence, more people today than ever before question the very notion of freedom. What is that freedom that we celebrate as a nation? Is Independence Day reduced to the mere hoisting of the national flag and official observances? Do Indians actually enjoy the freedom to think independently; to speak their minds; to take a stand without fear? We would be in denial if we believe that we enjoy the above freedoms. Increasingly it is becoming difficult for free-thinking individuals to articulate their views without being shouted into silence and intimidated for daring to speak up. Democracy has given us the freedom to make informed choices about who we elect to parliament and state assemblies. But Democracy is not just about voting and elections. It is about personal rights and personal choices. Freedom means substantive claims, entitlements and options anchored in each individual. In a democracy Institutions are created to ensure that those rights are secured and that no majority can and should touch this zone of rights. These rights are the essential elements of a just social order.

Those who live in a Democracy and by its guiding principles can never jeopardise these rights without consequences. While India has given unto itself a Constitution that seeks to uphold the basic human rights of its citizens, the social hierarchies have remained untouched. India has failed to dismantle caste hierarchies. Dalits continue to suffer from the deep-seated caste prejudices from the upper classes even today. They bear the brunt of economic deprivations despite policies that seek to remove inequalities. Closer home, Meghalaya is not exactly a democratic paradise either. Here too the space for freedom of speech and expression is shrinking. We are at a point where freedom as envisaged by the Constitution is largely curtailed by lumpens. The idiom of political language is one of aggression and suppression of dissenting voices. There are attempts to push forward the agenda set out by a few and to bring about a complicit convergence of views by brushing aside the need for reasonable discussions and debates.

Meghalaya does not exactly clothe itself in glory insofar as its human development indices are concerned. The fact that so many children are born in 108 EMRI ambulances informs us that life for many is still nasty and brutish. In terms of governance Meghalaya is rock bottom. These are issues that merit discussion and need to be addressed before laying the foundation for future growth. Until then Independence is only a word and August 15 just another holiday.

Khasi Lineage Bill - A Chimera Destined to Fail

By Febrieanna Syiemlieh

God save all the laws of the land. No ordinary citizen has time nor the resources to take on each and every politician acting bizarre. It is very much the duty of the opposition political parties, media and NGOs to put their act together and stand against such oddballs. The most bizarre of them all is the President of the United States who signs and seals by the minute multiple silly orders and passes them that even the White House Staff are left speechless and red faced while the whole world laughs at his expense. When Donald Trump is shown on TV news channels, People see nothing but a joker. Closer home, we have the Chief Minister of Tripura whose wonderful interpretation of everything and anything have us all in stitches. "say it like Biplab" jokes are now called a daily fix in the social media. Now back home we have our own policy maker who has just opened up his cottage industry of local brew sufficient for our daily fix.

In 2007, when H S Shylla was the Chief Executive Members (CEM) of KHADC, he made headlines by awarding a cash reward of Rs. 16000 to Amelia Sohtun and her husband Jimdir Rai for producing 17 children. The monetary award was given as a glaring example for the rest of the Khasi women to emulate. Since then, records show that production of off-springs through such intermarriages have now reached a record high. The baby boom policy of H.S.Shylla was a huge success and the biggest achievement of his political career. Now in 2018, after winning the MDC election after a long gap, he has returned back to the KHADC. He now wants to introduce a Bill to stop what he introduced 12 years back. By this new Bill, the offsprings of those marriages that he encouraged will be stripped of their rights to be Khasis.

Had this been some silly gaffe or meme, we would all forget about it after getting our daily fix from the morning papers but this time it is not to be so. Shylla thinks he is the supreme authority over the life and birth of Khasi children. No one has the divine authority to encourage and assess a mother to bear children and then strip her and her progeny of their identity. This smacks of an attempt to demolish a community which is in existence for the last thousand years. This action of Shylla has become a matter of grave concern.

If Shylla is a man of wisdom, he will opt for a functional approach to achieve whatever he intends to accomplish. It is radically wrong to try forcing his hand into a hornet's nest because:

a. Khasi is not even a tribe to begin with. It is the language otherwise we would have called ourselves Khasi tribe and not Khasi society.

b. Almost all our kur/clan titles start with "Khar". This is proof of the creation of our Khasi society. Clans came into existence when Khasi women married men from the plains. Khasi society was formed by the conglomeration of all these different houses with their given names that distinguished one from the other and hence the words Khar, Dkhar.

c. The Indian marriage act has enough of laws and KHADC can be at an advantage if rules and regulations are imposed according to the Act for the purpose of checking imposters and infiltrators instead of concocting such bizarre laws going against the law of nature. In this regard, we should ask ourselves why "tang jait" occupies a very important place in our Khasi history, customs and traditions.

d. The Govt. of Meghalaya has already passed the compulsory registration of marriage act:

i. The Act should be implemented.

ii. The office of the KHADC should deal with matters relating to

a. Notice of intended marriage application.

b. Certificate of Notice.

e. The role of KHADC should be to:

a. Run back ground checks based on the name and addresses of the persons on the application.

b. Verify all linked documents and determine the genuine identity of the persons in question and decide on their eligibility.

This is how the whole world determines all facts in today's computerized world.

In a Khasi society there is none who can throw the first stone. There is no such thing as pure blooded Khasis. We do not bear any characteristic physical features to distinguish ourselves from people of other communities. The colour of our skin and eyes come in all shades available under the sun and in fact it is the Khasis especially with mixed British blood who are tall and fair that we all love to see and take pride in calling them Khasi so let us not forget the fact that we came into existence by constantly following this long established, deep-rooted tradition of marriage as a matrilineal society. Yes, there may be flaws in this system but it is not a political matter for politicians to fix it instantly. We have our own kur to turn to when we have any concerns.

The Bible reads – "parents ate sour grapes and their children's teeth are on edge". Surely then the children will suffer the consequences of their parents action but again in the same Bible it is written – "the word of God is like a two-edged sword" therefore it cuts both ways.

The think-tanks of KHADC should instead ponder upon the stupid law laid down by the Government which reads that a person should know how to speak in Khasi in order to be called a Khasi. If this is the yardstick by which we are given our Khasi schedule tribe certificate and recognised as a Khasi then the marwari shopkeepers in Iew Mawlong are all eligible contenders to be called a Khasi.

Hitler and holocaust are part of history which nobody wants to talk about. Shylla will go down in Khasi history as the infamous politician who set out on a quixotic crusade with confused perception of all significant facts sans prudence and common sense. These are all symptoms of a disease called persistent delusional disorder. An impractical idealist who lost the way in a fantasy world and popped up blabbering gibberish, otherwise, how can one fathom the idea of stripping all Khasi women and their progeny of their Khasi identity and title? Or is Mr Shylla thinking of keeping a cut off year for this too?

The Bible reads – "parents ate sour grapes and their children's teeth are on edge". Surely then the children will suffer the consequences of their parents action but again in the same Bible it is written – "the word of God is like a two-edged sword" therefore it cuts both ways. Children of those on whom the stones are thrown as well as children of the stone throwers will suffer the same consequences of their parents' action!

Ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity. The law does not justify such actions therefore, if Shylla is still determined to put a stop to non-tribals marrying Khasi women even if it is by his own ingenuity, then the only way he can do so is by encouraging the formation of Seng Shynrang or Seng long kpa volunteers who may walk the lanes of their own localities as moral police the same way as Seng Kynthei and Seng longkmie volunteers to check on drunkards and trouble mongers in their locality. It is clear to us now that immorality, drunkenness, illicit, extra marital love affairs, multigamy that is rampant in our society is the core disease of all these aftermath surfacing overground today. This is totally a social problem and I don't think KHADC can issue any diktat to stop it. The need of the hour now is to help strengthen our basic moral values and teach the masses why co-habiting freely and living the promiscuous lifestyle is now looked upon by society with shame and contempt. This calls for much social work like the Temperance Movement which I am sure KHADC under the leadership of Shylla can sponsor and initiate like the baby boom programme of his in 2007 but this time for a sensible cause. This mission if successful will keep the gold-diggers and forty-niners away from further exploitation.

Thus it can be said that Shylla is radically wrong in putting up such a persistent stance with his chimerical Bill that has no functional approach and is therefore insoluble. Nothing will fruit out of such impractical imaginary dreams.

Is it worth celebrating Independence Day?

By Michael Makri

The celebration of freedom is not only the commemoration of our heroes' bravery and our people's victory that took place in 1947. It should rather be a way to scrutinize the difference between now and then. In name, India is a free country. We have our own Constitution, we have leaders that we elected through a democratic process (although doubtful) and we, the citizenry, enjoy basic rights (on paper only). But are these enough for us to be considered truly free? Basically, being free means not being under the influence of anyone, but freedom through the elimination of social and political ills that hamper the enjoyment of such rights.

Since the midnight of 14th August 1947, we claimed to be free, but greedy bureaucrats and politicians are pocketing the taxes we pay. Corruption is prevalent in the judiciary, police, public services, and public procurement sectors. It is only in India that both active and passive bribery are covered by legislation, and public officials are allowed to accept gifts or donations of nominal value. In our country, there is a low level of enforcement and monitoring, hence corrupt practices such as facilitation payments and bribes persist. We claim to be free even though many of us go hungry while the wealth of the nation goes into the hands of a few. I was inspired to check Google for the corruption Index of our South Asian Countries and I was amazed at their findings. While Singapore is ranked seventh we are 79th in the Corruption Perception Index. In terms of GDP per capita, Singapore is seventh and we are 157th according to the World Fact Book (CIA). So are we free?

We claim to be free while our women are being raped and murdered on an hourly basis. It is shameful that after 71 years of being independent our women and children are living in fear, not free emotionally, physically, culturally even in the choice of food and clothing. Rape is the second most common crime in India. According to The Wire, an online portal, "India's average rate of reported rape cases is about 6.3 per 100,000 of the population. However, this masks vast geographical differences with places like Sikkim and Delhi having rates of 30.3 and 22.5, respectively, while Tamil Nadu has a rate of less than one." Meghalaya is not far from Sikkim or Delhi if the daily newspaper reports are to be believed. The Wire continues to say, "even India's average rate of 6.3, which is not very high when compared with the rest of the world, suffers from under-reporting. According to a recent report by the Livemint, about 99% of cases of sexual violence go unreported. If true, this would put India among the nations with highest levels of crimes against women and children. So are we free? Are Indian women free? Are Indian children free?

We claim to be free while many cannot afford basic education. By the end of 2018, India's population is estimated at 1.35 billion based on the most recent UN data. Every year there is a 1.11% growth but the literacy rate of India this year is at 74% two percent short of the 2011 census. The drop down in this percentage is obvious. Education in India is for the rich and the well-to-do and not for the ordinary person. According to an Right to Education (RTE) study conducted by the DNA newspaper in 2014, there are 2085 villages in Maharashtra alone without the basic educational facilities. Matters India reported in 2016, about a village at Bardia (Lahichari) under Chhaygaon Block Elementary Education Office (BEEO) in Palasbari LAC in Kamrup district which has no school for over 2000 children of the said village. In Meghalaya there are a total of 12,878 schools for 6026 villages according to the Statistical Handbook of Meghalaya 2017, but the handbook does not mention if all villages in Meghalaya have at least a primary school. Can we say then that we are free??

We claim to be free while many villages have not seen a proper road and communication. The NCERT textbook in Unit IV, Chapter 10 on roads and communication stated that about "80 per cent of the total road length in India are categorized as rural roads". This implies that 80% of roads in India are not motorable during the rainy seasons. Like it is in our state, rural roads exist only on paper. One example is the NEC sanctioned road from Nongpoh via Umden to Sonapur which is not really a road in the strict sense of the word. Can we claim to be an Independent country? In 2013, I was given an opportunity to attend the Asian Humanism Conference held in Singapore, and most of the delegates—even those from Singapore—were envious of our country - India. But by what yardsticks are they envious? Is it by the reality of our country's debt, poverty, crime, corruption? Singapore certainly has more to celebrate. Its economy is better; its public transportation is better. To supplement its already impressive subway system, two years back it ordered an additional 91 super fast trains. We're barely managing with super slow trains, and several hours of traffic jams if we travel by vehicles. So is this the freedom that we deserve?

We claim to be free, yet many villages in remote India still live in darkness. On April 29 this year, our PM Narendra Modi tweeted that April 28, 2018 will be remembered as a historic day in the development journey of India. Yesterday, we fulfilled a commitment due to which the lives of several Indians will be transformed forever! I am delighted that every single village of India now has access to electricity.' But is this true? Forbes in their research after this announcement was made, discovered that 'according to official data, only 1,417 of India's 18,452 villages, or 7.3% of the total, have 100% household connectivity, and about 31 million homes are still in the dark. The government deems a village "electrified" if power cables from the grid reach a transformer in each village and 10% of its households, as well as public places such as schools and health centers, are connected."

In her tweet, Kristina Skierka, of Power for All, a coalition of over 200 public and private organizations campaigning to deliver universal electricity access by 2025, claims that "total electrification" is far from reality and can only be achieved when all the hamlets and households are covered. "As, defined, ' village electrification' still leaves 90% of the people living in India's 18,452 targeted villages without electricity," she says. So is it worth celebrating our Independence Day when we are still under the bondage of such social evils?.

The list is long. It appears nothing has changed much. We are still under the same old bondage. As stated above, our country is not yet debt-free, poverty-free, crime-free, or corruption-free. So what are we free from exactly and why do we celebrate it? On 15th August, our officials and those in government will celebrate Independence Day more than an ordinary citizen like myself, since in paper India has been an independent nation for seventy-one years. But what are we free from exactly and what aspect of the freedom do we celebrate? August 15 should be a day of introspection rather than of celebration.

TO THE EDITOR

Independence Day!

Editor,

August 15th 1947 commemorates our nation's freedom from years of rule by the British Government. It took years of fighting, mass violence, displacement of so many people and partition of a large nation to get us to this day. There are many stories we have been hearing since our childhood and of people who have sacrificed for the freedom of our country. It is the day when we remember the people who have contributed to our freedom.

However, the thing that particularly makes me happy is the fact that Independence Day celebration in Shillong is no longer a concern. I remember during my school days, we always celebrated Independence Day a day prior, on August 14. We called it pre-Independence Day celebration! We missed out the fun of celebrating Independence Day as it had become a usual practice where people would prefer to spend their time indoors. People feared to come out of their homes and children either spent time flying kites or stayed indoors watching parades on television. That was because for over a decade we could not celebrate Independence Day or Republic Day since on both days the armed outfits would call a bandh and people were so intimidated that they chose not to defy such bandhs

Shillong has a variety of cultures living peacefully for several decades. Though a Christian state, we still celebrated festivals like Diwali, Holi, Eid, Muharram, Durga Puja with same intensity. Despite the peaceful environment there was an underlying climate of fear and uncertainty that disturbed the peace every year for several years. I feel contented to see some schools especially opening to celebrate Independence Day and children who get to experience the true sense of Independence. A step like this is such an inspiration for the people, families and children to step out and celebrate a day which is of great significance to our country.

Shillong has had its fair share of problems but it is remarkable to witness such a positive change. A very happy Independence Day Shillong and to everyone!

Yours etc.,
Ankita Joshi,
Via email

The thought phobia

Editor,

India's Independence Day coincides with Sri Aurobindo's birthday. In his message on the day of India's Independence, Sri Aurobindo said, "August 15 is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work I began life with, the beginning of its full fruition."

It is indeed significant that the 15th August is the birthday of Aurobindo Ghosh (1872) and Free India (1947). While the former went on to become Sri Aurobindo (1910), the latter the Republic India (1950). Unfortunately, after 71 years of our independence, India is still facing hunger, malnutrition, children with stunted growth, child labour, slavery, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of human development, female foeticide/infanticide, untouchability, honour killings, atrocities against Dalits and rising inequality among Indians in an alarming rate.

What is the cause of such maladies? Why do we still remain prisoners of prejudices, superstitions and colossal wastage of human potential? Almost a century ago, in 1920, Sri Aurobindo diagnosed India's disease as thought-phobia. In his letter to his younger brother Barin, he wrote, "My idea is that the chief cause of the weakness of India is not subjection nor poverty, nor the lack of spirituality or dharma (ethics) but the decline of thought-power, the growth of ignorance in the motherland of Knowledge. Everywhere I see inability or unwillingness to think, thought-incapacity or thought-phobia."

Sri Aurobindo reminded us that unlike the middle ages, the modern world would evaluate such unwillingness to think as an abominable sign of weakness. He said, "Whatever may have been in the middle ages, this state of things is now the sign of a terrible degeneration. The middle age was the night, the time of victory from ignorance. The modern world is the age of the victory of Knowledge. Whoever thinks most, seeks most, labours most, can fathom and learn the truth of the world, and gets so much more Shakti. If you look at Europe, you will see two things : a vast sea of thought and the play of a huge and fast-moving and yet disciplined force. The whole Shakti of Europe is in that."

In 1920 even when Europe was in turmoil after the first world war, Sri Aurobindo had the insight to write, "People say Europe is running into the jaws of destruction. I do not think so. All these revolutions and upsets are the preconditions of a new creation. Then look at India. Except for some solitary giants, everywhere there is your "simple man" , that is, the average man who does not want to think and cannot think, who has not the least Shakti but only a temporary excitement."

What Sri Aurobindo said then has, unfortunately, remained as relevant today as it was almost hundred years ago, "Our civilization has become an achalayatana (prison), our religion a bigotry of externals, our spirituality a faint glimmer of light or a momentary wave of religious intoxication. And so long as this sort of thing continues, any permanent resurgence of India is improbable."

Indeed, we will get the society as well as the government we deserve. We have no other way but to do our Fundamental Duty as enshrined in Article 51A (h) of the Constitution of India ~ "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform" in ourselves to make our country awake.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.

"I dream of an India that is prosperous, strong and caring. An India, that regains a place of honour in the comity of great nations."

-- Atal Bihari Vajpayee

The Shillong Times

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Statesman par excellence passes on

AUGUST is a cruel month for India. Three political stalwarts died in quick succession. First it was Karunanidhi, then Somnath Chatterjee, and now, the doyen of the Indian political landscape – Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He was the first Indian Prime Minister who was not a member of the Congress party to have served a full five-year term in office (1999- 2004). In 1980 Vajpayee restructured the Jana Sangh into the Bharatiya Janata Party. An amiable gentleman he strode the Indian political landscape like a Colossus and saw it through many ups and downs. A poet with a gentle nature Vajpayee was never known for throwing barbs at political opponents. His speeches were laced with wit and poetry. But most of all Vajpayee did not believe in the politics of machismo we see today. He was able to build friendships across and beyond the borders of political ideologies.

At a time when the country was wracked by the politics of caste and religion, Vajpayee brought in the notion of good governance and connectivity. He conceived of the Asian trilateral highway. It was during his time that India's North East received maximum attention. The Ministry for the Development of the North East (MDoNER) was created in September 2001 by the Vajpayee Government. It was Vajpayee who crafted the term 'Look East' Policy which helped in improving India's ties with countries in South-East Asia and East Asia. Indeed, it was Vajpayee's statesmanship and his astute real-politik that changed the image of the BJP from being seen as a party with hard-line rightist leanings, after the demolition of the Babri masjid, to one that was respected by allies across the political divide.

India at the time also gained ascendancy as a nuclear-capable country when under Pokhran-II, five nuclear bomb tests were conducted clandestinely at the Pokhran Test Range in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district in May 1998. This was known as the American CIA's biggest intelligence failure. Although that event resulted in sanctions by the United States and the European Union, Vajpayee's strategically important and courageous decision made India a nuclear weapons power.

Vajpayee's tryst with Nagaland is considered a landmark because he coined the words "unique history" to define the Naga quest for sovereignty. He was the first Prime Minister to admit that mistakes had been committed by the Indian Government and to lament the needless violence in the state. But being the statesman that he was, Vajpayee also summed up his statement by remarking that the uniqueness of Naga history did not mean that Nagas are not patriotic Indians and that they cannot live with dignity within the Indian political framework. Vajpayee's demise has caused a huge political void in India's North East. He was the paternal figure of the region.

"The present KHADC Khasi Lineage of Customs Bill 2018 is an attempt to codify the customary practice of Ka shong-kha shong-man u Khasi (Khasi conjugal ties) as designed by wise elders. We reproduce below an article written by Fabian Lyngdoh in November 2013 when he was Chairman, KHADC as a primer for readers to discern the pitfalls of codification of customary laws and practices. "

On Codification of Customary Laws

By Fabian Lyngdoh

In spite of many academic disputes, majority of social leaders and scholars admit the reality of the concept of tribes and tribals, and the need for special protection of tribal people in the modern day political and economic system. The Constituent Assembly of India by incorporating the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution made it clear that there is actual need to protect the indigenous tribals who are still backward and marginalized. Hence the Sixth Schedule itself and the constitution of Autonomous District Councils codifies the existence of traditional institutions and indigenous leadership systems among the tribals.

It is stated that the tribals of Meghalaya still retain their customary laws and practices and traditional institutions. However, in a modern society supposed to be administered by age-old customs, it would leave ample scope for arbitrary application of customs by vested interests as no two cases would be dealt with in the spirit of law because the judgment is left to the subjective opinion of the traditional judge. Therefore some express the view that customs should be codified into Acts so that the operation of general legal practice can be applied to them. When viewed from another perspective, the codification of customs into Acts, defeats the very nature and meaning of preservation of customs. The meaning and implication of custom is supposed to be interpreted by the elders of the community only and its traditional authority. When a custom is codified it becomes a law which is open to the interpretations of lawyers and the courts. In vulgar language, a codified custom becomes a gold mine for lawyers rather than justice for the people. Through codification, any lawyer or judge would become an authority more legitimate to interpret that custom than the traditional authorities.

Man has always attempted to seek the truth and tries to fathom the mystery surrounding him. The way to the truth is different from one society to another, from one type of philosophy to another. The Khasis have their own process in finding the truth surrounding them. For the Khasis, first of all at the social level, there are ki ain (laws and rules) in all aspects of social life. Ki ain, by themselves are the laws and rules agreed among men and are socially sanctioned. Ki ain have their source in ka hok (right); andka hok has its source in ka sot (religion, divinely sanctioned laws and rules). Ka sot is also generally called ki riti-ki dustur. Ka sot has its source in ka nia (reason or argument of truth). Ka nia has its source in Ka Hok (Divine Rule, Divine Justice). Divine Justice or Divine Rule is here written in capital letter 'H', ka Hok. While for socially instituted rights it is here written in small letter 'h', ka hok. Ka Hok is a Divine power that surrounds the world or the human environment and it emanates from God Almighty. It is God's power that constantly deals with the affairs of man. From ka Hok emerges ka nia (reason or argument of truth). The Khasis believe that whatever is reasonable according to human intellect is also in line with Divine rule and Divine justice.

It is for this reason that God Himself has created man, therefore God would listen to the words of man, and it is on that ground that the Khasis instituted ka sot, a concept which is also equivalent to religion, to guide man's relationships with God and the world and also with all beings. Ka sot may be revealed by God himself or ia pan (set up by man but having been appealed to God for approval). From ka sot comes ka hok. Whoever has a place in ka sot for any aspect of social life would have the right in that aspect of social life, but whoever has no place in ka sot has no right. On the basis of this right man makes ka ain (law). Because of ka sot some individuals have the right to be u Syiem or Lyngdoh. Only a man who has an established kur (clan) has the right to take part in social affairs because he has ka sot which is called ka sad ka sunon, a concept which needs further explanation. Ka ain is what man made by himself and for himself, which can be created or changed by agreement among men only, and does not require to be informed to, or approved by Divine assent. Ka sot, whenever it is made by man always requires Divine assent. And, Ka tipbriew-ka tipblei (moral conscience or moral law) is the joint operation of ka nia (reason or argument of truth) with ka Hok (Divine Justice). When put in order the Khasi process of knowledge and experience goes like this:- Blei–>Hok–>Nia–>Sot–>hok–>Ain [God –> Divine Justice–> Reason–> Divinely approved law–> Right–> Law].For the Khasis, it is from the belief in the existence of God that starts the whole process of knowledge of truth. The idealist process of knowledge would run as follows:- Blei–>Nia–>hok–>Ain [God–>Reason–>Right–>Law]. Here we see that the concept of ka Hok and ka sot are not in the picture. The rationalists or scientific approach would be as follows:- Nia–>Ain–>hok [Reason–> Law–> Right].

Here according to the rationalist approach, everything must end at the level of reason, and man formulates his law only on what is reasonable, and can claim his right only as granted by the law. Modern democracy is increasingly leaning to the approach of: – Reason–>Law–>Right. But according to the Khasi philosophy, man can formulate his law only on what is rightful. What is rightful depends on the Divinely approved law called ka sot which is instituted in line with ka nia (reason) under the care of ka Hok(Divine Justice) so that everything would be in line with God. The connecting link between these stages of knowledge and experience is ka nia (reason, or argument of truth). It is from the eyes of reason or the argument of truth that man looks to God and his Divine Justice so that he can conceive of what is rightful and lawful. If Khasi customary laws and social practices should ever be codified, the above process of the truth should not be lost sight of.

Another problem that may arise with regard to codification of custom is in the definition of religious and philosophical concepts and precepts into legal and scientific context. For example, how would the Khasi concept of 'ka hok-ka sot', or 'ka nia-ka jutang', be defined in a legal instrument? An eminent Khasi author translated the concept, 'Hei nga bat ho la ka nia', into 'I stand by reason". This is conceptually wrong. It's proper translation into English would be, "I stand by my own principles as expressed in my argument of truth". My argument of truth would depend on situations I am in. As u Syiem I stand by ka sot of ka Sad-ka Sunon personified in ka Syiem-sad. As u Lyngdoh I stand on ka sot of ka Lyngdoh-sad. Or my argument of truth may also depend on a certain covenant I am connected with. This is expressed in the concept, 'ka nia-ka jutang' meaning, I constitute my argument of truth according to the provisions of the covenant I have entered into. So the concept ka nia-ka jutang does not mean rational argument, but an argument according to a covenant. And 'ka hok-ka sot' does not merely mean righteousness, but a right, a prerogative or a righteous behaviour according to ka sot that a person is connected with.

Likewise the concepts of 'iatai-nia', 'iasaid-nia', 'ka bishar', 'ka hok ka juban-lak' etc. cannot be ordinarily translated into modern legal concepts. To conclude, codification of traditional institutions and customs should be limited to the constitutional recognition of their existence but leave the detail of their functioning to the wise interpretation of indigenous authorities and not to confine to the legal interpretation of lawyers. On the other hand, any custom that can no longer be justly applied should be discarded and any traditional authority that cannot provide justice according to custom should be abolished rather than codified

(The writer can be contacted at fabianthaiang@gmail.com)

Child Abuse

State to be made accountable

By Dr Oishee Mukherjee

Recent horrific incidents of child abuse in shelter homes in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have elicited sharp response from various quarters, including the Supreme Court, on the culpability of State governments and local administration. Arresting individual culprits alone would not help end the scourge, which runs deep. In the Muzaffarpur shelter home even a child welfare committee member and the district child protection officer were accused of raping minor girls. The State must be answerable

And the Supreme Court has done precisely this. On Tuesday last, it was stumped when the Centre informed it that 1,575 sexually abused children are living in shelter homes run by NGOs across the country! This was not a rough estimate but based on a report by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) following an all-India survey conducted on shelter homes. Of the cases reported, 1,289 girls and 286 boys were sexually abused and 189 children were "victims of pornography"!

Statistics reveal that 30 to 50 per cent of Indians are sexually abused in the country, which has around five lakh child prostitutes. The World Health Organization (WHO) had estimated that 150 million girls and 73 million boys had been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence. Moreover, a large number of children, running into thousands or maybe even a lakh, both reported and unreported, are missing every year and around 25 per cent are not traced. These children are taken, mostly from villages and from urban slums.

Abuse and neglect are defined as "injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child". This abuse, according to the WHO, can be of several kinds--physical, mental, emotional, psychological or in the form of neglect or exploitation. It brings about circumstances causing harm to a child's health, welfare, and safety. There can be no denying that child abuse, in its various forms can be found everywhere in India -- in cities and rural homes, in homes of both the rich and the poor, and in the streets and schools.

In fact, trafficking in children, underage girls and young women is possibly the third largest organised crime next only to illegal trade in drugs and arms. Pakistan, Malaysia, Nepal and Indonesia are among others closely associated with such crimes. In India, like in most others countries in South Asia, poverty has been the main reason for human trafficking.

Legal measures to combat child trafficking are not stringent enough and State governments too are not serious about enforcement measures. Take for example rape cases--these are rampant in the country in spite of stringent laws, leading to nagging suspicion of a nexus between investigating agencies, the police and State administration. Only recently, an international organisation described India as the most dangerous country for women. And while the Government has denied and rubbished the report, it is confronted with the child abuse scandal.

How tough are the country's laws to safeguard women and children? The main legal provisions are the Indian Penal Code 1860 with several stipulations to deal with the use of criminal force against women and female children – Sections 354, 366, 366 A, 366 B (selling minors for prostitution), 373 (buying minors for the purpose of prostitution) and 375. Unless enforcement is strengthened, legal provisions have little value, thereby raising a demand among civil society to ensure a lady officer and at least one official in each police station to deal with such crimes.

Additionally, the Juvenile Justice Act 2000 has had very little impact. The economic situation, lure for money and a growing materialistic culture are also reasons for increase in child abuse, especially among girls. Moreover, with a liberal culture spreading in cities, free sex for money is on the rise. Besides, the National Crime Records Bureau has spoken about the relationship of victims and accused in rape cases.

A thin silver lining, if we may call it, is that the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (POCSO) and Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, has been strengthened recently to contain child rights' violation. As a result, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of child abuse cases filed, translating into an increase in number of convictions. But this is still not enough. Bihar and UP shelter homes have revealed that sexual abuse of the inmates was rampant, making a mockery of the laws.

Sadly, shelter homes instead of providing succour to destitute children have turned into centres of sex trade. Perhaps, these need to be linked to schools which must be run by trained staff and should have qualified counsellors and educators. This could be considered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, which has done well by calling for social audit of all 9000-odd shelter homes in the country.

However, what comes as a surprise is that it is novel order. Social audit, as per exiting recommendations of the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), has been mandatory for organisations and institutions that are government-aided and have a public interface! Therefore, the Ministry must ensure that its instructions simply don't remain on paper and at the same time have the audit conducted by an independent agency such as an academic body or a consultancy or research organisation so that there is no political pressure.

This apart, the Government must set up separate tribunals/fast courts for cases of sexual abuse and impose severe penalties. It may also consider steps such as making moral and sex education compulsory in schools and colleges; raise awareness of sexual abuse through mass media; perpetrators of such crimes be given psychological treatment and school teachers be trained for detecting symptoms of sexual abuse among children. Extra effort would need to be made to detect child abuse at home or by family members, as experts say this is often a hidden phenomenon. At the same time, focus on child labour, prostitution, any form of abuse in State-run institutions such as schools, or aided homes needs to be sharper and all-encompassing.

It also goes without saying that societal abuses which are a result of poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, poor health, neglect need to be addressed. Since economic and social conditions are inextricably linked together, child maltreatment prevention programmes too must be widely publicised. The presence of social networks and a stronger family support system could facilitate bring about awareness in prevention of child abuse, be it any form.---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

HS Shylla's epoch-making decision

Editor,

HS Shylla, the incumbent CEM, KHADC has the uncanny knack of creating waves right from his youth when he was the leading figure in social movements and for that matter he has won admiration and greeted with howls of derision too from among the people at large. It bears recall that when Shylla was the then CEM of KHADC in the past session he had taken on unprecedented measure in encouraging the Hynniewtrep family to produce many children - a policy which is in sharp contrast to the National Family Control Programme. No wonder, many had come down heavily on Shylla for such a radical idea. However, I for one, had visualized the futuristic wisdom of such a vision when viewed from the context of what is currently occurring in Western Europe where the rate of fertility amongst the European women has plummeted, thereby leaving a vacuum for hordes of people from the third world countries of Afro-Asian origin to cause unabated influx to the affluent European nations. I'm afraid that in less than no time the indigenous European whites will be reduced to a minority themselves, as a consequence.

Be that as it may, it appears that Mr Shylla, as the present CEM of KHADC is having a tryst with destiny by passing the Khasi Lineage Bill, 2018 thereby stirring up a real hornets' nest and reportedly provoking a few women associations not excluding some of our sophisticated elites to bay for his blood. Mr Shylla must have been painfully aware of the fact that there has been wide-spread mixed marriages between Khasi ladies and non tribal males, where such wedlock has more often than not ended in exploitation in the field of trade and other such social benefits unavailable to the non-tribals. Perhaps, this Bill in question may not face overwhelming and persuasive detractors but nonetheless Shylla has unwittingly unleashed a wake – up call on the entire Hynniewtrep society. And it goes without saying that Shylla's boldness in this defining venture may be comparable to what the late MN Majaw, as a Revenue Minister of Meghalaya had done in passing the much desired Land Transfer Act which has definitely gone a long way in safeguarding tribal land from being alienated. In fine, this letter is not intended to eulogize Mr Shylla but for us to see the hard facts concerning the Hynniewtrep society in its true perspective.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong- 2

Travesty of Indian Independence

Editor,

On August 15, 1947 at the stroke of midnight, India got freedom from the 200 years of oppressive British rule. The Freedom we got was a mix of joy and sorrow as the Nation was divided into India and Pakistan due to difference of religion! While half of India was beaming with joy, celebrating Independence, another half was fighting with poverty, homelessness and fear of death from fellow Indians due to communal riots that followed the Partition. In spite of all the bitterness, our founding fathers vouched for a united and progressive India, where the weakest of the weak would be able to live a dignified and productive life. But even after seven decades of Independence , we still have to bear the scourge of communalism, casteism, corruption, etc., which seem to greatly nullify all the effects of the tremendous economic and scientific advances we have made so far. Here a paradigm shift in our thoughts and actions is needed if we truly want to see a progressive and unified India in future. To quote Pandit Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny,' "We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action".

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H.Laskar,
Guwahati.

Clarification

Editor,

The news item titled "Patients suffer due to tussle of doctors at NEIGRIHMS" (ST Aug 7, 2018) needs clarification as the doctor concerned whose name appeared in the news has represented to Director NEIGRIHMS clarifying her position regarding the news report on her refusal to take up the Urology Operation. In her letter to the Director, NEIGRIHMS, she has written that on the date mentioned she was actually allotted other responsibilities. Dr. Rajini Thabah has stated in her letter, "This false accusation in the media has disturbed not only me but my entire family. Such defamatory news has resulted in intense mental turmoil especially as I am a lady. I wish to bring to your notice that in the past also there was an effort to tarnish the image of female anaesthetists of the institute through an item published in the same publication." The administration of the Institute has time and again written to the Editor of The Shillong Times to kindly verify facts before publishing it in the media as such news items tarnish the image of the Institute and instigates the public against the employees who work tirelessly in the interest of patient care.

Yours etc.,
Dr K K Pandita
Public Relations
Officer
NEIGRIHMS

Editor replies: We have our own sources of finding out the anomalies in the Institute and reporting them without the need to go to the Director to confirm our stories. If patients have a genuine grouse, it is our duty to give ear to them rather than to the higher ups in the Institute who will always come up with alibis. If a Urologist has scheduled an operation and that is being rescheduled for whatever reasons that is not the fault of the patient but of the Institute and such fault ought to be rectified.

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

"A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone."
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXI No.8 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, AUGUST 18, 2018

A healthy India

HERE, now, is the promise of a better, healthier India. The fifth and last Independence Day address by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was appreciably marked by the unveiling of an ambitious national healthcare initiative - Ayushman Bharat or Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyan from September 25 which could benefit an estimated 50 crore people, or 10crore families, from the poorer sections -- with a provision for healthcare insurance/cover of up to Rs 5 lakh per family per year. Admittedly, one of the major concerns of the poor, who cannot afford to pay for the rising cost of healthcare, has been addressed. This merits adulation just as the previous UPA government came up with a food security scheme at the behest of Sonia Gandhi during the second term of the Manmohan Singh-led dispensation. Put together, these two schemes are bound to be of immense help to the nation's suffering multitudes, who live in hopeless conditions. This goes to show that successive governments are doing a good job in relation to social welfare. However, what also requires proper attention is the farm sector where more meaningful insurance schemes and MSP should be in place, and the spectre of joblessness for the rising army of Indian youths due to the government's failure to expand the industrial/manufacturing sector.

The government is mindful of the plight of the farmers - whose suicide rates are arguably increasing - and this is evident from the PM's offer to double farmer income by 2022. Whether this will happen or not remains to be seen, though. The 'Beej Se Bazar Tak' scheme launched by the Modi government needs to gain further pace. The address from the ramparts of the Red Fort also raised fresh hopes about Indian Space forays, with plans to send manned missions from India in 2022 for the first time. Space science is where India has been having an upper hand vis-à-vis China, but that scenario might reverse sooner than later, considering the relative speed with which India and China function at various levels of governance, skill upgradation, and experimentations. Overall, though, democracy keeps India in good stead. This Independence Day is fresh proof that governments care for poor and the weaker sections which too have a right to live, and work with dignity. Social security apart, several other key areas cry for special attention. Corruption, evident in the scams and NPAs in the banking sector will affect the Indian economy in the long run. The slow pace of infrastructure development; the urban mess, the lack of uptick in the industrial sector, for instance, need be speedily addressed. Indeed speed is of essence in governance.

The politics of demagoguery

Continuing with the KHADC Bill saga

By Avner Pariat

Why must we be led by cunning demagogues? Every populist leader has to be a fire-starter. To incite and instigate is the modus operandi. And what have they led us to? An uncertain future! In fact, who is even drawing up any worthwhile vision of any future which is workable, open and clear? In the absence of people with real substance, we have been forced to accept the loudest people as saviours. This will not, and has never led us anywhere. We are led astray towards the most impossible solutions which are non-agreeable to anyone and stubbornly we issue diktat after diktat proclaiming what we desire to be the one and only solution out there. Negotiation is dead. I wish fear didn't rule over us, I wish desperation were not the only thing we know intimately. I wish people stopped to stand and smell the flowers.

The KHADC Lineage Bill as expected has been sent back for further reworking and it is highly unlikely that the Bill will be approved in spite of popular (but fragile) support. The many flaws of the bill were pointed out by many legal experts and their words have been prophetic. But the more important questions behind the Bill still linger in the air and will continue to float up into a fire-storm every few years until we are resolved to address them. The reality of the Bill is that it arises out of a number of bad ideas which have been circulating within our society for a number of years now. One of the main ideas has been the idea of "Khasi blood". This is supposed to be a marker of difference which separates the Khasi from the non-Khasi. There are supposed to be varying degrees of purity and pollution. But scientific investigations have revealed that no "blood" is pure. That there are many different genealogies at work within different ethnic groups! One of the salient features of the Lineage Bill is this separation of "bloodlines". It is not directly mentioned within the Bill but it is clearly one of the ramifications/goals.

One of the good things that has come out of this fight over the KHADC Bill has been the different questions posed over identity. It is clear that identity cannot be simply defined as is often done in legal formulations. In fact, we are in a conundrum today precisely because of the over-simplified definitions that we have grown up with. Many of these were Colonial ideas but we have accepted them as part-and-parcel of the Khasi way but those can be discussed elsewhere. How can we attempt to simplify complex human interactions and relationships? Can we really "bill" them onto a piece of paper? Those are the questions that every liberal-minded person has asked in this newspaper. But can I be very honest? On a personal front, I am as irked as anyone from the Right when I happen to meet someone with a Khasi surname but who is unable to form any coherent sentences using the language. It irks me when I hear stories about how a few non-tribals use the ST income tax exemption to their own benefit. These things happen and they can be very infuriating but then I remind myself, firstly, that sometimes people end up speaking a different language based on a number of personal reasons; secondly, that tribal businessmen are as cunning and manipulative as non-tribals. I remind myself not to judge someone based on their names but on the type of people they show themselves to be. I remind myself that everyone deserves a chance to prove themselves.

That is why culture and not blood is a much better marker for belonging. It should make no difference if someone is "khun shiteng" (a half-Khasi) or not, what is more important is how they "become" Khasi. My own grandfather, IM Simon, was a "khun shiteng". His father was a Tamil, member of a linguistic family which has no deep roots in the region unlike the other non-tribal groups such as the Bengalis and Assamese. So if you're talking about "genuine" and "non-genuine" cases, my great-grandfather would have been at the furthest end of the queue. Now it should have been that my grandfather spoke only Tamil, or Hindi or English. But he didn't. And why is that? Because he was raised up to be and grew up into a Khasi. He was schooled and taught by the community in his beloved Laban to "become" Khasi. He eventually became a well-regarded teacher and writer within our vernacular. This was, of course, way before KSU, before KHADC, before STIEH, before Maitshaphrang, before SRT, before H S Shylla, before this obsession with "purity". But many people will say: "Avner that was in the past, things have changed now." Yes, it is true they have changed but not because there are more people and more pressure on certain resources and reservations. They have changed because we have lost an inclusive, warm-hearted, embracing community. No law can substitute for that. A couple of years back, in Jowai, on Christmas Eve, I had attended my neighbourhood bon-fire party. Many young children and teens were given the task of entertaining the audience and this included a young Scandinavian boy whose mother happened to be Pnar. He was not the only "khun shiteng" there, mind you. There are many in Jowai who are of mixed lineages but there is no sense of victimhood or excessive pride attached to that fact. It just so happened, it is not a big deal to them. The community is what matters in the end. Taking from it while also giving back is still a very important social task in many shnongs. It is quite nice to observe, but in this day and age such systems need our active support in the face of newer systems of societal organisation which are antagonistic to them.

Yes, we may look for the non-tribal bogeymen to blame and hunt down. But the real issue is a systemic one and no amount of distraction can confuse us forever. Much of these woes have been brought about by the inept and irresponsible attitude of the politicians who lord over us. That is the real meat of the matter and the sooner we wake up the better we will all be as a society. Can we really blame the scams and crimes of the powerful only on non-tribals? Yes and no. No, because it is a state (and region) where tribals hold sway over all political matters so they are directly responsible for the abuse. Yes, if we trace the origins of the systemic rot of the country to Delhi. After all, the swindling and con-games start from there, in the back-rooms of Parliament and the many ministry offices. And there for the most part, it is non-tribals who are at work and play. But then again, if we look beyond the bias of ethnicity, we start to understand that is not a question that involves tribal or non-tribal but rather the elites of the country. They personally benefit by scaring us and driving us to anger. These self appointed defenders are obsessed with preservation and the past, which are good things to an extent. However, they must also realise the fact that our people need to arm themselves for the future. In that regard, they are woefully behind the times.

Vajpayee was diametrically opposite to Modi

Gujarat riot in 2002 was a dividing line

By Amulya Ganguli

History will see Atal Behari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi in completely different lights for being almost diametrically opposite to one another.

The differences between the two BJP prime ministers related mainly to their temperament and outlook, which, in turn, guided their approach to governance where it concerned coalitional politics.

There is little doubt that Vajpayee established a record of sorts by running a mammoth coalition comprising 24 parties which had never been accomplished before and is unlikely to be achieved by any of his successors in the future.

This remarkable exercise in togetherness between parties which had little in common in terms of ideology could last for more than three years from 1999 to 2002 because of Vajpayee's Nehruvian breadth of vision, who instinctively appreciated the multifaceted "idea" of India notwithstanding his saffron lineage.

It may be recalled that Vajpayee had described India's first prime minister as Bharat Mata's "favourite prince" and Nehru, too, saw in the young Jan Sangh M.P. as one of his successors.

It will not be out of place to say that in the "new" India of today, Nehru is routinely excoriated by those in the corridors of power at the centre.

It is not surprising that Vajpayee's coalition began to fall apart in the wake of the 2002 Gujarat riots when, among others, Farooq Abdullah and Ramvilas Paswan, walked out. Two years later when the BJP lost the general election and the Congress came from nowhere to score a surprise victory, Vajpayee blamed the riots for the BJP's defeat.

After all, he had laid the foundation for the alliance when in the aftermath of his inability to form a government after trying for 13 days in 1998, he said that the BJP would shelve the three key points on its Hindutva agenda - the building of the Ram mandir in Ayodhya, the introduction of a uniform civil code and the scrapping of Article 370 of the Constitution conferring special status on Kashmir.

The moderation which he displayed in this act of taking a step backwards, tactical though it may have been, is worthy of emulation by any party which seeks to scale the height of power.

In the context of Vajpayee's success in forging a mahagathbandhan (grand alliance), it is not surprising that doubts are being expressed today as to whether the BJP will be able to form a coalition in case the party falls short of a majority in the next general election.

The reason for the other BJP hardliners which included L.K. Advani.

But it is the tenets of raj dharma which have again come to the fore at a time when the minorities are feeling insecure, as a former vice-president Hamid Ansari has said, and "mobocracy" is evident as never before, persuading the Supreme Court to intervene and the government to consider enacting a special law against lynching.

In contrast to such near-anarchic conditions, as a petitioner in the Supreme Court has said in the context of the violence involving the gau rakshaks and kanwariyas, Vajpayee's period in power appears in retrospect to be an oasis of peace except for the Gujarat riots.

Even in the matter of economic reforms, which is supposed to be Modi's forte, Vajpayee's initiatives relating to the "strategic sale" of a number of PSUs including Modern Foods, Balco and Hindustan Zinc, were more noteworthy than at present when the government is unable to find buyers for Air India. From all possible angles, therefore, whether moderation or accessibility which marked Vajpayee out as a thorough gentleman, he leaves behind a legacy which will not be easy to match, especially by those whose conduct is characterized by arrogance. (IPA Service)

The moderation which he displayed in this act of taking a step backwards, tactical though it may have been, is worthy of emulation by any party which seeks to scale the height of power. In the context of Vajpayee's success in forging a mahagathbandhan (grand alliance), it is not surprising that doubts are being expressed today as to whether the BJP will be able to form a coalition in case the party falls short of a majority in the next general election.

TO THE EDITOR

Poor response from Mahindra Finance

Editor,

Mahindra Finance is very particular when it comes to recovering its loan from customers. Even a slight delay in repayment of instalments result in continuous calls. But amazingly when the loan is cleared and the client asks for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to state that he/she has cleared the loan, Mahindra Finance does not care to reply. It is very discouraging for potential clients to experience such a dismal response when it is the Company's turn to reciprocate a simple request for an "NOC." When they look for potential clients they pursue them to the point of being a nuisance but when everything has been set and done clients are no longer important to their prestigious organization. Mahindra Finance should wake up before the reputation of the Company is drastically affected due to their utter and blatant disregard to provide service to their clients.

Yous etc.,
Pynshai Syiem,
Via email

Justice for our children!

Editor,

This refers to the article, "State to be made accountable" (ST, August 17, 2018) on child abuse by Dr. Oishee Mukherjee. It is a shame that child shelter homes in Muzaffarpur in Bihar and Deoria in Uttar Pradesh have been used for sexual exploitation of children. Surprisingly, adverse reports on those shelter homes had allegedly been ignored. While the Muzaffarpur Social Welfare Department had given an adverse report on the shelter home, the Deoria shelter continued to flourish even after the suspension of its licence.

Be it cruel exploitation of children in shelter homes or callous attitude in controlling those homes or engaging children in labour or keeping millions of children hungry in our country and thus making their growth stunted forever - it shows that we do not want to take care of our future citizens. What will we answer if God asks us why we let milk and honey go down the drain to cool off his head depriving his children of food? We sweep the fact that we fail our children, under the carpet of overpopulation. But it is a lame excuse. To know how densely a country is populated, we must study the figure of population density and not just the number of population. Population density is calculated by dividing the population by the area.

According to 2011 census, the population density of India is 382 per square kilometre but it is as high as 488 per square kilometre in the Netherlands. Now, if we compare the Human Development Index rank of these two countries, we will see that India is stuck at the HDI rank of 131st but the Netherlands is at the enviable 7th position. While we have achieved only 74.4 per cent literacy, the Netherlands has got 99 per cent. The fact of the matter is we fail to adopt the policy of inclusive growth for human development and labour intensive technology for creating an employment bridge that can take the food to hungry mouths. As a result, while astronomical amount of food items are left to rot; 48.2 million children in India are facing hunger, malnutrition and stunted growth.

Children do not have voting rights. But if we neglect our children, we will simply destroy our future. How can a country be strong if its future workforce remains malnourished, stunted, unskilled and traumatized? We easily understand the importance of our future citizens when it comes to our own children. Strangely enough our vision becomes blurred when we talk about the children of our own country!

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Is India really free today?

Editor,

For 72 years now, we have been celebrating freedom and lauding and commending our nation and our freedom fighters. Every year August 15 evokes patriotism and love for our country. Special functions are organized, special messages and photographs are shared on social media, long stories, articles and memories are written and published. There are widespread rallies and jamborees on August 15. There was a time every freedom fighter, every person, every Indian fought for their freedom, their liberty, their nation in unity and integrity. It is said, 72 years ago that the Partition would ensure that the two nations- India and Pakistan would live peacefully and that it would limit bloodshed. Partition was for a cause they said.

But what about the present scenario in our country? The country was divided into a major two parts then; the country is divided into innumerable parts today. Caste, creed, race, class, color, occupation, sex, religion are a few prejudices overpowering the free and patriotic minds of people today. There is a sense of utmost and infinite freedom in every person on every patriotic day. When will the sense of bias, hatred, inferiority, discrimination and prejudice towards each other, towards the society, towards the downtrodden, the oppressed, turn into empathy, compassion, love, unity and above all equality. Because people come under the category of a superior and prestigious caste or religion or occupation, it does not give them the right and the authority to look down on the inferior castes or to insult and slot people into different categories and biases.

When there is absence of basic courtesy, humanity and equality within the nation, celebrating freedom and liberty looks like a mere showcase of pretence and sham. Does freedom and patriotism even carry a meaning when the mind, the heart, the soul, is biased?

Yours etc.,
Avantika Sharma,
Via email

Surplus Electricity Bill at Laitryngew

Editor,

The MeECL office located at Mawmluh, Sohra has failed on all fronts. With deep anguish and despair, the residents of Laitryngew have been crying foul at the sudden and periodical rise of electricity bill which had affected both the haves and the have-nots alike. It is surprising that even when the electricity has been disconnected, still the current bill (not outstanding bill) was being distributed from the said office. When the line was disconnected and the meter had stopped working, how was the current bill generated? Of course, the outstanding bill needs to be paid. This shows that the meter reading is being done and manipulated from the office rather than taken by a meter reader. If so, why need a meter or a meter reader? For instance, in my house, the present meter reading was 5905 and previous reading 5849. The units consumed should have been 5905 – 5849 = 56 units or 56 kwh on that particular month. But surprisingly, when the bill came, it showed that the present bill was 6095 which was an excess of 190 units. When the electricity has been disconnected from where from did the concerned authority charge this inflated bill of 190 units? Is this not a case of theft and injustice? Just imagine how many voiceless families and individuals of Laitryngew alone have been affected and become the victims of this illegality, fraud, and malpractice of MeECL personnel.

The irony part of this whole drama is that when I tried to discuss with the Lady Engineer In-charge, she harshly responded that I should pay that FAKE bill also and hastily left the room in the middle of our conversation. None in the world would like that type of stubborn attitude especially from the officer in-charge. This is an indication of inhuman treatment and exploitation meted out to the public and a clear violation of human rights. Hence I have no choice but to publicly and openly plead with the higher authorities to look into this matter very seriously and it would be best if we get new, humane and reliable workers especially for the post of Engineer In- charge who can serve the people with empathy and understanding.

Yours etc.,
John B. Kynta
Laitryngew –Sohra

'Bhupenda was an inspiration'

Singer, actor, dancer.... there are many facets of Rose, alias Kavita Baruah. The 78-year-old artiste, who is also a social worker, speaks to *The Shillong Times*

Kavita Baruah, who is popular among the Assamese as Rose Hazarika, retired from films years ago but the multi-faceted artiste still remains a household name in Assam.

Born in the famous Hazarika family in Guwahati in 1940, Baruah's musical journey began at an early age and was greatly influenced by eldest brother Bhupen Hazarika. In fact, her formative years were influenced by stalwarts like Bishnu Rabha, Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Phani Sharma, who spent a lot of time at the family home, working closely with Hazarika and rest of the brothers and sisters.

"My training started at home and I never had any formal training outside the family. We were 10 brothers and sisters and all of us were trained at home. I had also performed Manipur dance," says Baruah, who is the seventh among the siblings. All the siblings were once closely associated with All India Radio, she informs.

Baruah says Hazarika, or Bhupen*da* as the siblings called him, was the guiding star after their parents, Nilokanto and Santipriya Hazarika. Her cultural life included dancing, acting and singing. She was in Class II when she first performed in Bishnu Rabha's *Xurore Deulore* (1948), a dance drama, in Bhorolumukh, Guwahati.

A young Baruah was involved with various cultural and social organisations in different parts of Assam. She represented Assam in the first Republic Day cultural performance in New Delhi and performed tea community folk dances for the state's tableau.

Baruah did her schooling from Panbazar Girls' High School and finished Bachelor of Arts from Handique College, Guwahati University. Later, she went to Kolkata to get Diploma in Library Science from Calcutta University.

She grew up as an artiste with Indian People Theatre's Association (IPTA) along with luminaries like Hemango Biswas. "Hemango *da* was like a member of the family and he was a great inspiration. After Bhupenda, he was our mentor," says 78-year-old Baruah.

Later, she was a part of the founding team of Madhusayanika, a socio-cultural organisation recognised for its contribution to Assamese art and culture. She was also an active member of the Cotton College cultural affairs where she studied. Baruah first went to Kolkata in 1960 for a song recording for Assamese film *Shakuntala*. Later, she moved to the city in 1962 to pursue higher studies and stayed with her brother Bhupen*da* at Golf Club Road in Tollygunge.

When Baruah was in Kolkata, the art and culture scene in the city was at its zenith and she worked with several big names, besides Hazarika. Few Bengali artistes she met during her stay in Kolkata were Jahar Ray, Nripoti Chatterjee, Tarun Kumar, Anil Chatterjee, Aparesh Lahiri, Basuri Lahiri, Pahari Sanyal, Shabana Ajmi, Hemanta Mukherjee, Salil Choudhury and Haimanti Shukla. She also sang with Debabrata Biswas, who is considered the king of Rabindra*sangeet*, Sandhya Mukhopadhyay and others.

Baruah was closely involved in the making of Assamese films by Hazarika contributing to various aspects of production and music.

Filmed in Assam and Kolkata, some of these productions include *Loti Ghoti*, *Pratidhyoni. Chik Mik Bijuli, Erabator Xur* and *Mon Proja Poti* (co-produced by her husband Upendra Kumar Baruah).

Kavita acted in *Chik Mik Bijuli*, narrated and sang Bihu with Moghai Uja for *Pratidhyoni* and performed folk dances for *Erabator Xur*.



With All India Radio, Guwahati, Baruah was part of programmes like *Akonir Mel* (during her childhood), *Aidew Buloni* (women's programme) and later with various radio drama series. Her popular songs include *Prathama Prahore Ratri* (with Ila Bose) for the film *Sakuntala*; *Godhuli Ahil* (music Jayanta Hazarika, lyrics Nirmol Prabha Bordoloi) and *Radha Sura'r Phool Guji* (inspired by tea community folk music/lyrics Bhupen Hazarika) for a commercial His Masters Voice (HMV) record, folk song *Baijensun* for long playing record, a folk compilation *Bareboronia*; Goalporiya folk *Dhouli Mure Mai* and *Birinda Bonere Kune Bahi Bai* for Hazarika family albums *Nijoraparor Xur* and *Rod Puabor Karone*.

She got married to Upendra Kumar Baruah, an architect, author and cultural patron from Tezpur and lived in the US for a few years before returning to Assam. Upen Baruah's works include production of early Assamese movie *Mon Proja Poti*, involvement with the Civil Rights movement in Chicago in the 1960s culminating in the authoring of *A Portrait of A Gandhian — A Biography of Dr. Martin Luther King* with foreword from Mrs King and Mrs Gandhi. These were besides his contribution to the northeast India as an architect.

Talking to *The Shillong Times* over phone from Guwahati, Baruah says she has wonderful memories of Kolkata and the house where she stayed with Hazarika. She visited the house in 2015 with her son, Joor Baruah, a documentary filmmaker.

"In 2018, there was news that the Assam government is trying to buy back the house. We (the brothers and sisters of Bhupen*da*) are extremely grateful to the Assam government for this initiative and hope that the old memories of the house are restored and maintained," says Baruah.

Baruah has been involved in social work for the last two decades. She is currently an advisor for *Xixu Kanon*, an Ethos project involving underprivileged children and orphans and volunteer Vice President (Joint) of Association for Social Health in India, a non-profit organisation that focuses on health issues of the region, especially women's health. She often teaches music and dance as part of these initiatives.

Recently, she worked as the creative advisor for the documentary *Adi | At The Confluence* directed by son Joor. The documentary film has been shown in over 30 international film festivals and won eight best documentary awards.

There are many facets of Baruah's talent but the artiste retired from the silver screen years ago. In fact, she says she does not even watch films. "Nowadays I sometimes go with my son to watch films. For a long time I did not like the movies made today but it will be wrong to generalise as I haven't watched all films," says the artiste.

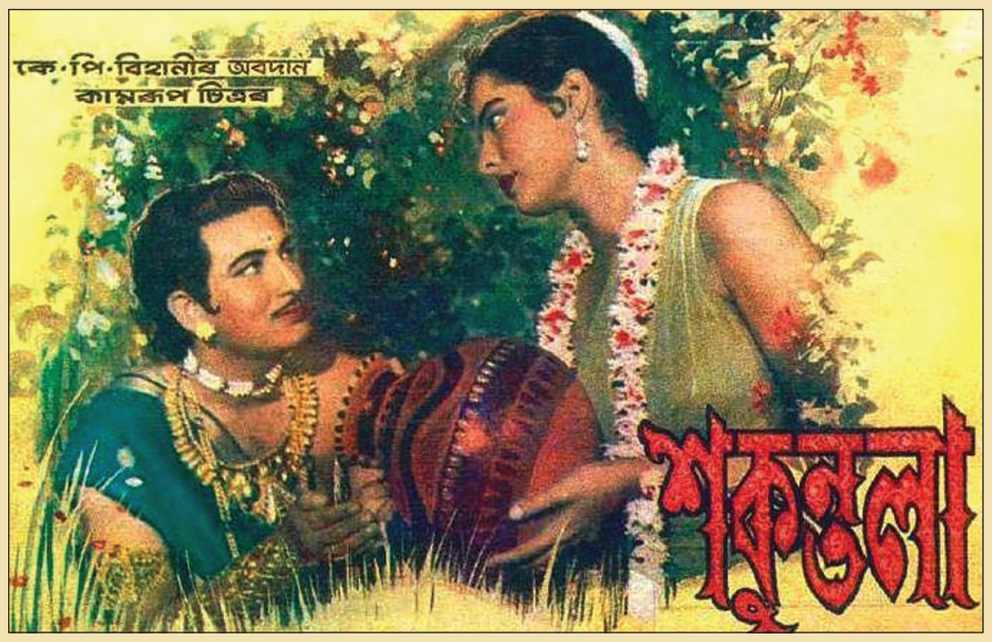
About Shillong, she says she spent some wonderful time at brother Baren Hazarika's house.

"We would visit Shillong during summer. His house was the meeting place of artistes from the region, including Khasi artistes like Helen Giri and Monalisa Lyngdoh. We recorded songs on Shillong. Bhupen*da* would visit the hill city often," she adds.

MEMORIES OF THE GOLDEN DAYS









(From left) Kavita Baruah with Bhupen Hazarika, the posters of Mon Prajapati and Shakuntala and with Hazarika, husband Upen Baruah and daughter Heea

Stage set for literary retreat in the Himalayas

By Saket Suman

In the #litfest age of selfies and celebrities, Bhutan's annual literary retreat resonates with a mix of the old-world charm and the contemporary vibe. Set to take place in the coming week amid the surreal setting of Thimphu, the extravaganza will open its doors to over 75 eminent personalities from the fields of writing, film and theatre.

Over the course of its previous eight editions, the festival, organised by the India-Bhutan Foundation (IBF) and Jaipur-based literary consultancy firm Siyahi, has set the pace for discussions on ancient cultures and contemporary issues.

While Siyahi is headed by Mita Kapur, a literary agent representing some of India's biggest authors, the India-Bhutan Foundation has an intriguing story as it was born out of the wealth of our two nations and is a landmark investment of its kind.

Established in August 2003 during the visit of the present King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (then Crown Prince) to India with the aim of enhancing people-to-people exchanges in focus areas like education, culture and environment protection, the body has the ambassadors of Bhutan and India as its co-chairpersons.

The Royal Government of Bhutan and the Government of India have contributed Rs 5 crore each as the main IBF corpus and the entire amount of Rs 10 crore has been kept in a fixed deposit in Bhutan.

The interest earned from the fixed deposit is used for financing proposals received from Bhutanese/Indian citizens and NGOs on studies, research, and similar activities. Mountain Echoes has enjoyed the support of IBF on similar lines.

"Come, be a part of Bhutan's homegrown literary retreat and experience a mesmerising blend of art and culture," the orgainsers said.

The festival will be inaugurated on August 22 and will reach its culmination on August 25, and will be spread across five venues, hosting over 35 sessions.

As the neighbouring countries enter their 50th year of formal diplomatic relations, the shared history will manifest itself in the form of an engaging tête-à-tête between Bhutan's ambassador to India, General V Namgyel, and India's ambassador to Bhutan, Jaideep Sarkar.



Mountain Echoes will open its doors to over 75 eminent personalities from the fields of writing, film and theatre. IANS

This will only be a prelude to what Mountain Echoes will etch over the three days.

Bollywood veterans Naseeruddin Shah, Ratna Pathak Shah and Sanjna Kapoor will bring alive the magic of theatre at the festival; celebrated names such as Daniel C. Taylor, Valmik Thapar and Dave Goulson will regale audiences with stories of their adventures with nature; and one of Bhutan's best kept secrets — its bustling music scene — will also come alive during the festival.

Two prominent art exhibitions, 'Colours of Nature by Green Pigment' and 'Tree of Life: The Tree of Immortality' by Penjor Dorji and Malvika Singh will enthrall the festival attendees with their grandeur.

'Tree of Life: The Tree of Immortality' will be represented across wall hangings, tent panels and tribal art amongst other forms. It has been painted by the inmates at the Jaipur Central Jail and will be brought to the festival by Rajasthan's Department of Tourism.

As each year, it will celebrate "Untouched Beauty, Unexplored Ideas and Unstoppable Voices" from the heart of the Himalayas.

Mountain Echoes enjoys the patronage of Bhutan's Royal Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. Pramod Kumar KG, Tshering Tashi and Namita Gokhale are co-directors of the festival.

Besides the stunning natural scenery, the enduring image of the country for most visitors is the strong sense of culture and tradition that binds the nation and distinguishes it from its larger neighbours.

The weather is just perfect at this time of the year in Thimphu; the flowers in bloom and majestic mountains will give company to its many visitors. Buddhist chants and meditative prayers come together to lull the surrounding in a spiritual bliss.

Druk Air is the only operational carrier for travel into Bhutan, operating a single flight daily from New Delhi. Hotels are available in most parts of Thimphu at decent rates. More details are available at the festival website: *www.mountainechoes.org*. *(IANS)*

Know the population story

By Ranjan K Baruah



Demography is the statistical study of populations, especially human beings. As a very general science, it can analyse any kind of dynamic living population. Demography encompasses the study of the size, structure and distribution of these populations, and spatial or temporal changes in them in response to birth, migration, ageing and death.

Demographic analysis can cover whole societies or groups defined by criteria such as education, nationality, religion, and ethnicity. Educational institutions usually treat demography as a field of sociology though there are a number of independent demography departments.

Current estimates indicate that roughly 83 million people are being added to the world's population every year. Even assuming that fertility levels will continue to decline, the global population is expected to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100, according to the medium-variant projection.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1968 International Conference on Human Rights where family planning was, for the first time, globally affirmed to be a human right. The conference's outcome document, known as the Teheran Proclamation, stated unequivocally: "Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children."

This year's theme of world population day which is observed on July 11 is "Family Planning is a Human Right".

In biology, a population is all the organisms of the same group or species, which live in a particular geographical area, and have the capability of interbreeding. In sociology, population refers to a collection of humans.

Demography is a social science which entails the statistical study of human populations. Population in simpler terms is the number of people in a city or town, region, country or world; population is usually determined by a process called census (a process of collecting, analysing, compiling and publishing data).

There are courses available for the study of population. Courses are popularly known as population sciences or studies.

Population Science is a research discipline that looks for having a transitional brunt on public health and clinical practice through reduction in disease risk, incidence and death as well as improved excellence of life for all individuals.

Population Science looks across the entire spectrum of factors that can impact health outcomes.

These health factors include the realms of healthcare, individual health behaviours, environmental factors, social and economic factors, policies and genetic determinants of health. Researchers in the field of Population Science come from various disciplines, such as public health, medicine, pharmacy, economics, demography and urban planning. These researchers work together to solve the major health concerns facing population groups.

Students after completing their graduation may do specialisation on population studies which are available as MSc or MA courses in different universities. Apart from full time courses there are some short term courses like diplomas or certificates programme apart from short term training programme. One of the best institutes to study these courses is Indian Institute of Population Sciences. There are scopes in India as we have many activities carried out for the population of India. From surveys to activities these subjects bring scopes for young people to work related to population.

Aspirants may get jobs in government departments, research institutes or developmental organisation after finishing their courses related to population studies.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

CAREER GUIDE

Demography & Population Studies

Use of formalin in fish an old practice

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Formaldehyde is a chemical which, when mixed with water and turned into a paste, is used for embalming dead bodies and preventing the decay of dead cells. When a human body is given to a professional funeral parlour, for instance, the blood is taken out and formaldehyde is injected so that the deceased looks normal before being buried. People who hunt, or have pets, often have the dead bodies of the animal "stuffed" by taxidermists and kept in their houses. Labs and teaching institutions do the same with cadavers.

It is used in commerce as formalin.

Formalin is a saturated solution of formaldehyde gas in water. It contains 37-40 per cent formaldehyde gas with a stabiliser. The most common stabiliser is 10-12 per cent methanol. Methanol is also toxic for humans.

As it is a strong disinfectant and tissue hardener, it is used for preserving biological and anatomical specimens. It is also used as an antiseptic in sterilising surgical instruments.

Can formaldehyde/formalin cause cancer?

As far back as 1980, laboratory studies showed that even sniffing formaldehyde could cause nasal cancer in rats. In 1987, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classified formaldehyde as a probable human carcinogen. Now the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified formaldehyde as a human carcinogen.

Since the 1980s, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has conducted studies to determine whether there is an association between exposure to formaldehyde and an increase in the risk of cancer. The long-term effects of formaldehyde exposure have been evaluated in epidemiologic studies (studies that attempt to uncover the patterns and causes of disease in groups of people).

NCI surveys of professionals who are exposed to formaldehyde in their work, such as anatomists, embalmers and funeral industry workers have seen that these individuals are at an increased risk of leukaemia and brain cancer compared with the general population.

The study, which looked at funeral industry workers who had died between 1960 and 1986, showed that those who had performed the most embalming, and those with the highest estimated formaldehyde exposure, had the greatest risk of myeloid leukaemia.

An additional 10 years of data on the same workers were used in a follow-up study published in 2009. This analysis showed a possible link between formaldehyde exposure and cancers of the blood and lymphatic systems. Earlier analysis of the NCI study found increased lung cancer deaths among industrial workers compared with the general U.S. population.

A study of 11,039 textile workers, performed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, also found an association between the duration of exposure to formaldehyde and leukaemia deaths. Several studies have found an association between formaldehyde exposure and nasopharyngeal cancer.

Why am I telling you this? Because in June this year, authorities found 9,600 kg of fish, preserved in formalin, being exported to the rest of India at the border check post of Arayankavu in Kollam district.

Raids followed. 6,000 kg of fish were found laced with formalin in eight trucks in Palakkad. 14,000 kg of formalin prawns were found entering Kerala from Andhra Pradesh. Instead of burning them, officials returned the trucks to AP and they were probably rerouted by the factory owners to another state.

The state food safety department officials intercepted a cargo of chemical-laced fish from Tuticorin in neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

The fish, which arrived in two vehicles, included 7,000 kg of prawns and 2,600 kg of other species.

The citizens of Kerala eat 2,500 tonnes of fish every day 60 per cent of which come from local sources and the rest from other states. The Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) in Kochi has found 63.9 milligrams of formalin in every kilo of fish and 4.1 milligrams in every kg of shrimp.

The office of the Food Safety Commissioner has its hands full. Thousands of kilos of formalin fish and seafood are coming in and out of Kerala every day. They have issued a health warning that says fish vendors have been found to be selling fish products, including crustaceans, treated with formalin. In the last month 28,000 kg of adulterated fish have been destroyed.

Is this a new practice? No. Formalin has been used for many years now to give the appearance of freshness to weeks old fish. First it was used when fish moved interstate. Now it is used on all fish which move a mile. Why are the authorities cracking down on it now? Because, while they have been aware of it for years, only now has the CIFT developed a kit to detect ammonia and formalin!

Does this happen only in Kerala?

The fisheries department in Punjab sounded an alert 15 years ago saying that all fish coming from Delhi was contaminated and specifically naming the Pangasius or Basa catfish. The then health minister of Delhi, Dr A.K. Walia, said he was unaware of it and did not take any action at all. Every day about 30-50 tonnes of fish arrive at Ghazipur Fish market from Orissa, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. No checks have yet been done. But whenever a truck has been checked in other states the Basa fish, farmed and exported from AP, has been found adulterated. It takes a week for the trucks from A.P to reach North India. Between September and March, Punjab consumes nearly 250 tonnes of Basa fish every day, mainly eaten by very poor farm labourers from other states.

As far North East as Nagaland the practice is so prevalent that a notification had to be issued this year prohibiting the sale of formalin-laced fresh fish products.

So far the Kohima district administration has seized four vehicles. Nagaland Food Safety Commissioner has prohibited the storage, distribution, and sale of fresh fish products treated with formalin or ammonia, with a fine of Rs 10 lakh for any violations. This includes crabs, lobsters and prawns. Assam has put a ban on all fish entering it, after they found formalin in all the fish.

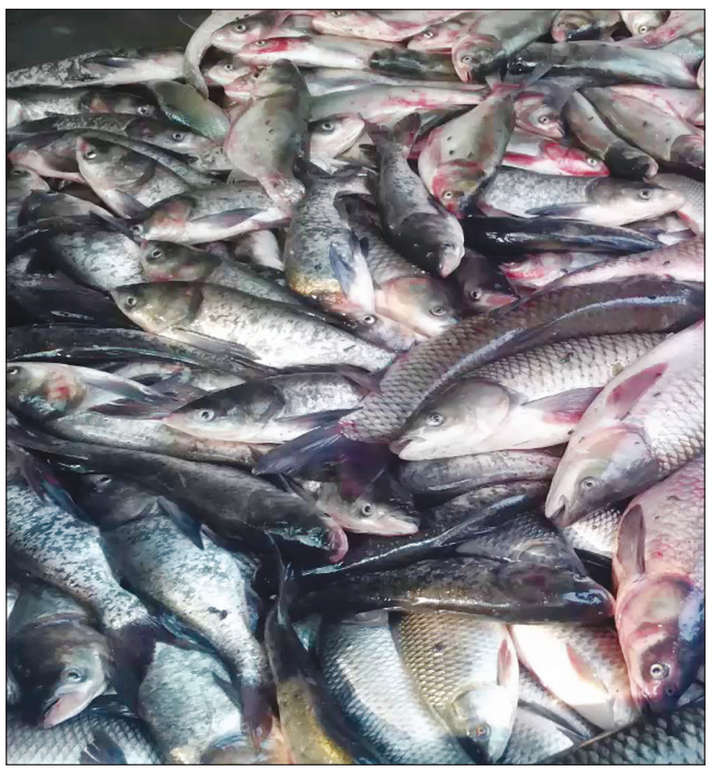
Odisha has issued an order to collect fish samples from all markets after they found formalin from the Unit IV fish market on July 13th.

Maharashtra is bringing in laws to regulate the fishing industry which will now make it mandatory for all fish sellers to get licences, and which lays down norms on prohibited preservatives. There is currently no law about sale/purchase/transport/storage/use of preservatives and where fish should be dried.

Fish sale has increased by 5.6 per cent in the last year alone. You will find that the sale of formalin has increased by ten times that amount, which means a similar increase in abdominal pain, vomiting, unconsciousness and cancer.

If you want to test the fish you buy, get a kit from the CIFT. Remove the strip and rub it on the fish. If it turns blue, you are eating formalin.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)



Research done by Dr. Martin H. Fischer of Rush Medical College, Chicago on the toxic effects of formaldehyde and formalin on humans shows:

▶The inhalation of formaldehyde gas in even small quantities is followed by bronchitis and pneumonia. Pneumonia is due to the inhalation of the gas and not to secondary infection. Pneumonia and bronchitis are found in all animals after an injection of formalin.

▶Formalin belongs to that rare group of poisons which is capable of producing death suddenly when swallowed.

▶The introduction of formalin into the stomach is followed by the production of gastritis which varies greatly in character. The duodenum and small intestine may also get inflamed.

▶Even a very dilute (1-1000 parts) injection of formalin causes inflammation of the stomach lining. Once in the abdomen, formalin exercises a destructive action upon all organs (pancreas, liver, peritoneal fat, fallopian tubes, etc.) with which it comes in contact and causes inflammation in these organs.

▶The injection of formalin into the muscles produces myositis or inflammation of the muscles.

▶When formalin is dropped into the conjunctival sac a painful inflammation of the iris follows and may be severe enough to destroy the eye.

▶Formalin, in whatever way introduced into the body, is absorbed and capable of producing lesions in the respiratory organs.

▶Changes in the liver after absorption of formalin consist of mild or severe cloudy swelling. Necrosis may result.

▶The injection of formalin, or the inhalation of formaldehyde, produces cloudy swelling of the kidneys. Necrosis may result.

▶Animals subjected to chronic poisoning with formalin develop fibrinous peritonitis, associated with marked eosinophilia. Peritonitis is the inflammation of the peritoneum, the lining of the inner wall of the abdomen and cover of the abdominal organs. Symptoms may include severe pain, swelling of the abdomen, fever, or weight loss.



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi *Sunday, AUGUST 19, 2018*

Jupiter trine Neptune on your solar return chart indicates that you will become more interested in visionary ideas and projects and this will be reflected in the work you do as well as helping you use your latent creativity. If entering into a professional life then you will not face any hindrances. Financially it will be quite encouraging and a lot of funds will be there for you to spend and invest on family members and for domestic comfort. The health or probably the attitude of someone in the family could be the cause of concern.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



This phase brings excellent results. You would express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with people. In your interactions make sure that you avoid conflicts. Your social life may be restricted to work and family obligations. Look at present situations from a higher perspective to realize what is happening around you. You need to conserve health and energy and deal with practical details and finances. Chances of a pilgrimage as you realize that you cannot control or plan too much as the unexpected is expected.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



An established business concern flourishes and partnership may expand into triangular collaborations. Success and good fortune at work open new horizons for expansion. Look at the present situations from a higher perspective to realize what is happening around you and act accordingly. Your domestic life takes on top priority and you support family members and feel comfortable and secure this week. You have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support with family. You may visit and spend a lot of time in company of your beloved one. Intimacy and warmth are powerful stimulants for you at this time. You may redecorate your home and add to the interiors to feel rejuvenated.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



This period brings a phase where you can win the trust of people in authority. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel a part of the whole, as this brings new opportunities and monetary gains. Avoid making compromises with your own truths, values and priorities. Your strong spirit supports you through the changes. This is a period in which you can successfully use charm, and your sense of humor to make peace with others. You can improve your love life by bringing more affection, love and a feeling of togetherness. Unusual attractions and dreams could feature now as you spend time with your beloved.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



This week brings mixed results. On the professional front, it would be better to let go of the past and make a new beginning as something greater awaits you. You may feel professionally unstable and emotionally insecure. Avoid indulging in any arguments and confrontations especially with people in authority. Financially a good week, you earn well and your communication skills are impressive. Communicate listen to others, express yourself, and get everything done in your favor. Talk to your beloved one and don't keep yourself away from people, enjoy the feeling of togetherness. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



New horizons open up for you and this boosts your self-confidence and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently and bravely. Take advantage of your courage and go ahead to achieve desired goals. You may be able to finalize a property related issue and this brings financial gains. Also you have been highly motivated to make money and this brings positive results if you use your communications skills. Your domestic life takes priority as you discuss future plans and enjoy moments spent together. You might spend time in making short trips meeting friends and loved ones. You may feel restless at times; eat health food, yoga and meditation recommended.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



This is going to be an exciting time. You are most likely to express your views in an intellectual and unconventional manner. This brings success and reward in overseas related matters. You will get success in overseas projects and earn well from these associations. You enjoy good moments with your beloved, your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you big boost of confidence. The unattached can look forward to meeting someone who catches their eye. However this also brings financial pressure as you incur expenses on traveling, trips and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to further professional ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



This period brings mixed results for you. You will face obstacles at work and could get embroiled in controversies. Be wary of those who entice you with seemingly attractive ideas. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth putting off for the time being as projects could get stalled. The desire for some form of recognition is strong. Financial success on the other hand is enhanced now. You may have a difference of opinion with spouse and health of some of the family member may suffer. Try to give moral support and help. However, people in love will have a great time as they listen to the inner feelings for each other.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



The planetary configuration brings good results particularly at the work place. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity in your work. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes are on cards. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and speculations and adopt new strategies in financial matters. Your loved one would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You may visit holy places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would add creativity to your work and projects in hand. This is the best time to use your higher education and skills to promote your career prospects. Strong chances of up-gradation and new responsibilities could come up. Concentrate on the work at hand and you may need to work more and put in extra hours. Avoid confrontations and arguments at the work place, as this would spoil time and energy and brings no results. You have more work, less time so go ahead and meet challenges to complete the desired task. There may be a romantic development at your work place. Listen to your heart and express your feelings to your beloved.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



The planetary configuration promotes your luck. New ideas and attitude to resolve issues would be beneficial. You will meet with appreciation even from unexpected quarters. Your professional prospects improve as you communicate well and interact in more positive way. You exhibit leadership qualities as you lead from the front. On the domestic front, try to compromise in family related matters. Change your priorities and support your spouse with love and affection. You will be in demand on the social front. You may visit religious places. This is an especially spiritual time for you--a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



This phase brings good luck and appreciation in property and land related matters. This is the best time to resolve land and property related issues as this brings good returns. On the professional front, you have to be careful to meet desired success. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings. Avoid any conflicts and confrontations. Children do you proud as they make progress in their chosen field. You can improve your love life by being more proactive. Some of you may fall in love with an intellectual person of a much younger age. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet programme to rejuvenate energy.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



You tackle work related issues and handle all legal matters successfully. People in law, justice and related fields will have great time as they use their talents and skills to meet desired success. Sports, competitive exams and fighting spirit come to the fore. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. Differences and discordant tendencies between people you love could crop up. You have to be very careful and try to be friendly, cooperative and helpful to resolve the issues. our style of communication boosts your magnetic powers and this brings favorable results in your romantic life. You need to conserve health and energy.

"Our truest life is when we are in our dreams awake."
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times
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New Talaq Bill

THE amended Muslim Women (Protection of Right on Marriage) Bill is welcome. The Bill seeks to ban Triple Talaq. The Legislation passed in the Lok Sabha in December 2017 has been appreciably watered down. The criminality provision has now been dealt with. Only an FIR filed by the victim can now be accepted. That means the wife, blood relations or relatives by marriage. If husband and wife agree to settle differences, the magistrate can compound the offence. This change is welcome in a society where Muslim women often receive step motherly treatment. The magistrate according to the new amendments can grant bail to the accused. The Government emphasised the need to bring in facets of women's empowerment in the Bill. What is imperative is to ensure gender justice. But the Bill should not be regarded as an instrument for imposing the views of the majority community. The Government has to allay such misconceptions. Union Law Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad made it clear in Parliament that the Government will see to it that the Law is not misused in the name of justice.

The amendments should overcome the criticisms of the opposition which should not think that their business is just to oppose. It has not yet been indicated if the objections of the Opposition, especially to the criminality clause have now been suitably addressed. There was no time for debate in the Lok Sabha. Regrettably the Bill has been hanging fire since December 2017 and will now have to wait until the winter session of Parliament to be passed by the Rajya Sabha. This time the Union Cabinet approved three crucial amendments to the Bill, including a provision for bail to an accused before the start of the trial. This was one of the three demands put forth by the Congress to support the Bill. The other two demands are allowing a close relative of the victim to file a case on her behalf and to allow a magistrate to settle disputes between the couple, which the government has refused to incorporate in the Bill.

The Bill was prepared by an inter-ministerial group headed by Home Minister Rajnath Singh. It makes instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat in any form - spoken, written or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp - "illegal and void." As per the provisions of the Bill, the husband could also be fined and the quantum of fine would be decided by the magistrate hearing the case. The Bill was introduced again this time as the practice continued despite the Supreme Court striking down 'talaq-e- biddat'. The Bill is a step towards social uplift and should not be politicised.

Plight of farmers in Jaintia Hills

By HH Mohrmen

Saying that farmers are the backbone of the economy of the country is now the empty rhetoric that our leaders love to shout at the top of their lungs during elections. There are also those who say that since the majority of people living in the villages are farmers, therefore they lazily conclude that more than seventy percent of the country's population are famers. These statements are common and one would hope that the government takes good care of this huge section of the population. Alas! In reality the opposite happens. The government may have tried to do more for the welfare and the betterment of the farming community, but it is not enough; still much more needs to be done because what trickles down to the farmer is a pittance.

Recently farmers in Jaintia hills had to sell their tomatoes for a song; some for as low as two or three rupees per kilogram. And there are those who feel insulted to sell their products at such throwaway prices that they decided to dump the tomatoes at the nearest dump yard instead. We also have many stories of farmers who on hearing about the fall in the price of tomatoes in the market simply left the tomatoes to rot in the fields. The government has been talking about minimum support price for the farmers on each of their products but the reality is that the farmers are still at the mercy of the traders.

However, it is not just the tomato farmers who are face this problem but ginger growers, broomstick and even turmeric growers face the same problem of marketing their products. In reality of all the farm products grown in the area it is only rice which has no problems with marketing. Last year we had many farmers under the Thadlaskein Block who reported that they have to replant all their harvest because the price of ginger was very low and even the famous turmeric farmers find difficulty in marketing the produce. Like any other produce the price of broomstick is again decided by the traders.

Then there is the issue of traders deducting several kilograms of their products when they sell them at the wholesale markets like Ïewduh. In fact this is not only a practice peculiar to Ïewduh but it happens everywhere where farmers sell their products in bulk. The farmers have been at the receiving end from all direction.

It is also true that the collection centres which were supported by the Horticulture Department have helped the farmers in collectivising their products and we have seen this idea replicating elsewhere even without the support of the department, but the crux of the matter is how do we link them to the market and how do we help famers take control of the situation?

Not only agricultural products face this problem but it has also come to light that even poultry farmers are beginning to feel the pinch once they start increasing production. In a meeting held on August 14 convened by NABARD, DRDA and Basin at DC's office Jowai, a poultry farmer who said that she reared two thousand chicks per batch also reported that she and other poultry farmers are having problems in marketing the chicken because of the huge imports from outside the state. We were informed by another farmer who is also engaged in trading of chicken that Jowai market alone consumes not less than four tons of chicken per day and he insisted that local producers will not be able to meet the market demand, so we are in a situations where we are damned if we enhance production and damned if we don't.

Though some of our farmers are into commercial farming and produce tomatoes, ginger, turmeric and broomstick in large quantities but a large part of the farming community are still engaged in subsistence farming. The primary objective of most of the farmers is to plant for their own consumption. They only sell the surplus in the market. This is the mindset which is still prevailing amongst the farmers in the area.

The reason that farmers are constantly at the receiving end of the stick is because unlike those who are in other businesses they are not an organised lot. It may be mentioned that those who engaged in other sectors like transport be it taxi, buses, hawkers or even those who are in coal business have been able to organise themselves. They have associations or organisations to represent them but the farmers are yet to come under one umbrella to voice their concerns.

Then those who look at credit access as an indication of economic progress would be disheartened because they would like to see our farmers take loans from the bank to increase production. On the other hand a farmer not taking loan is a blessing in disguise for themselves. Farmers' reluctant to take loan is what has prevented farmers' suicides' in the state! In spite of repeated advice from government and non-government agencies to avail credit to increase their production; most farmers refuse to do so. On many occasion we conclude that farmers do not take loans because it is just not in our culture to do so but now we realise that they are smarter than us because they would have fall into a debt trap had they taken loan.

It is obvious now that the major issue here is market linkages and how to counter market fluctuations. The government could either find ways and means to control the price which is next to impossible or to create infrastructure like cold storage so that farmers can store their perishable goods so that they are not compelled to get into distress sale but can wait for the a better price to sell their products. The other option is to encourage entrepreneurial development in food processing; this will help reduce the stress on the farmers on how to market their produce. It is also another viable alternative for job creation amongst the educated unemployed youths.

The other problem is that last year the Government of Meghalaya went gung-ho in launching the state organic mission but where are we now? The farmers continue to use pesticides and chemical fertilizers with gusto and people who produce organic vegetables find no place to sell their products. Ultimately they have no other alternative but to sell their niche products together with non-organic produce and all their efforts went down the drain. The Government has done precious little apart from launching the mission and the obvious reason is that the state is not serious in its organic mission.

Meghalaya is also caught in an amusing situation where there is a flourishing trade of smuggling cows and oxen to Bangladesh. With the kind of terrain we have in the border; the same will be difficult to stop. And the government is not making an effort to legalise the trade which can be a major help to boost the economy of the locals. It is also true that the National Live Stock Mission concentrates only on diary development but not on fattening of cattle which is an age old practice in the state. The State Government should therefore come up with its own cattle breeding and fattening mission because there is a huge market inside and across the border too.

There are reports in the media on a regular basis about how much cows have been confiscated by our border security forces from the different border outposts in the state, But the very fact that exporters continues to illegally transport cattle across the border in spite of all odds is because it is a flourishing business. Meghalaya should therefore move the Central Government to allow export of cows to Bangladesh. We all know how huge the market is. On the premise that fattening of cows has been an age old tradition of the people in the state, the government should pursue the matter with the central government to allow export of cows from the state to the neighbouring country.

There has been so much talk about improving trade relationships with the neighbouring countries but Meghalaya has not capitalised on that. Perhaps the state government should not only try to impress on the central government to allow export of live cattle to the country, but it will be able to create more employment in the state if it encourages meat processing wherever it is feasible.

It is high time that we stop looking at the farmers as target of our programmes and subsidies. We should instead see them as equal partners in improving the economy of the state.

National TV Media finally smell 'petrichor'

Kerala bracing up for more trouble ahead

By Aditya Aamir

It took a pyre lit to look at a province drowning. Atal Behari Vajpayee couldn't have died at a more wrong time. National television news media couldn't take eyes off the ex-PM. His poetry became the anthem, the lament of the dirge from God's Own Country lost in the distance. Till Vajpayee hogged news-time, it was saturation coverage of the hearse and the horse leading the death march, not of water-saturated deathly Kerala.

'Direct, O Lord, my God, my way in thy sight.' That was the psalm from the Bible that went missing in the poetry sessions – the Kavi Sammelans – which replaced panel discussions. Of course, the 'headlines', and the 'news bulletins', did record the record rainfall in Kerala and Idukki Dam opening "shutters" but the misplaced priorities of editors-in-chief were in glaring display.

Death toll dramatically climbed, the urgency limited to Kerala – Malayalam television news channels. The Centre refused to be caught in the middle! Only the "national television media" could have effected a dramatic shift, informed Modi that talk of 'federalism' shouldn't be only for public consumption and stump speeches.

Kerala asked for thousands of crores but Rajnath gave Rs 100 crore, a drop in the ocean. Now Modi has had a bird's eye view and made an assessment. Emergency relief of Rs 500 crore is welcome but that's not going to restore the grasshopper to life. Rebuilding and rehabilitation will take many thousand crores, upwards of Rs 19,000 crore, says Pinarayi Vijayan.

The Kerala Chief Minister has so far lead from the front, kept his cool and not gone off the cliff or the cuff to take pot-shots at the misers in Delhi, the stingy Hindutva votaries, maybe because God's Own Country is religion-neutral, not Hindutva's Own Country. Now, some Hindu-types are saying the deluge is Swami Ayyappan's revenge for making a hue of 'Men Only' but that doesn't wash even in washed out Kerala.

The problem was Reporter TV, Manorama TV, Asianet TV, Jeevan TV, Mathrubhumi TV and what-else TV have you, spoke a lingo that was hard to catch to the ears in Lutyen's Delhi. Sad to say, but let's face it, 'national TV news channels', especially the English-spouting, are notoriously Modi-fixated and if Modi had eyes only for Atal, there was no way Arnab, Rajdeep, Rahul and Bhupendra would have cut to close-ups of Kerala.

Sad commentary on the media. One man's death counted more than the lives of thousands. Misplaced priority? But who's gonna tell that to a media sold to an idea, an ideology? Even the left-liberal couldn't let go the opportunity to drop anchor and RIP Modi with Vajpayee. It was once in a death-time chance! And Kerala sank under the radar. Poetry with pregnant pauses became the signal-tune. Anecdotes became hard news. Headlines stood out in verses. Only poetry.

All the while God's Own Country drowned – dams opened sluices. Cloud bursts blasted earth. Mountains made rock-fall. Landslides and landslips happened along the way. Water washed away roads. Water laid open cracks. Water uprooted trees. Water entered homes – one storey, two storeys; rooftops turned into islands of refuge.

Where were all the rescue boats?

Now, with marooned people gathering rainwater in buckets to quench the killing thirst, bellies sticking to the spine, national television media have at last found their calling, which is not poetry-politicking but getting the politicians, especially the ruling ones – the likes of Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Home minister Rajnath Singh – to get off their backsides and lift people out of waterholes.

Today's Kerala is a chain-link fence of shelter-homes and winch-hanging choppers hovering over islands of despair; the over 70 dams silent sentinels after the devastation they caused to the countryside and its network of highways with fury out of control.

The waters will recede, they have to, but when that happens there will be new worries left in the wake – waterborne diseases and such like. Hospitals are themselves crippled and will be on crutches. Medicines and safe drinking water are the desperate wants. Indian Navy ships are anchoring at Kochi with gallons of mineral water while jerry-cans used to store kerosene are being used to buoy make-shift rafts. There's special place for Kerala in the navy man's heart, he trains in Kochi to take on the ocean!

The problem for God's Own Country is what's called 'Bombogenesis' – "a rapidly intensifying area of low pressure" often called a 'weather-bomb' – originating from cyclone-country Odisha! A haboob – a thick dust storm of sandstorm – would have helped but this time there wasn't even the 'Petrichor' – the distinct scent of rain in the air; to be more precise the name of the oil released from the earth into the air before rain begins to fall – to warn! (IPA Service)

Kerala asked for thousands of crores but Rajnath gave Rs 100 crore, a drop in the ocean. Now Modi has had a bird's eye view and made an assessment. Emergency relief of Rs 500 crore is welcome but that's not going to restore the grasshopper to life. Rebuilding and rehabilitation will take many thousand crores, upwards of Rs 19,000 crore, says Pinarayi Vijayan. The Kerala Chief Minister has so far lead from the front, kept his cool and not gone off the cliff or the cuff to take pot-shots at the misers in Delhi, the stingy Hindutva votaries, maybe because God's Own Country is religion-neutral, not Hindutva's Own Country.

TO THE EDITOR

Incompetent MeECL staff!

Editor,

I wish to highlight the frequent power failure in our locality - Lumshyiap. The MeECL which provides power has failed miserably since it cannot address the long-standing problem. In fact, this week alone, power failure had reached such an abysmal low that we had to do without electricity for about 6-8 hours daily. We made frequent calls to the office located at Polo to find out the reason for the power outage but had to listen to vague excuses such as repair work and other mumbo-jumbo. The point is, if MeECL has to undertake repair work, then it is incumbent upon the officer in charge of the office to inform beforehand about such work vide a notice in the newspaper or by informing the headman so that the message can be relayed to the people? Personally I feel that the main reason for this continued power failure is the lack of technical skills on the part of the MeECL workforce.

Technical persons are actually supposed to tackle such problems without any hitch. The inefficiency of the Area Manager who is the main person responsible to the consumers also leaves much to be desired. As customers we pay our bills regularly and we expect better service from the MeECL. We should not be made to suffer just because of the ineptitude of the workforce that the Corporation employs in the office at Polo. If the technical staff cannot solve the problems of regular power supply they should be replaced immediately by others who are capable of delivering and thereby solving our long-standing problem.

Yours etc.,
K Thangkhiew.
Shillong- 1

Hinduism does not preach untouchability

Editor,

Hats off to Avantika Sharma for the letter, "Is India really free today?" (ST, August 18, 2018) where a very pertinent question has been raised, "Does freedom and patriotism even carry a meaning when the mind, the heart, the soul is biased?" Sri Aurobindo had said, "There are two Hinduisms; one which takes its stand on the kitchen and seeks its paradise by cleaning the body; another which seeks god, not through the cooking-pot and social convention, but in the soul. The latter is also Hinduism and is more enduring than the other."

As a matter of fact, the narrow version of Hinduism, "which takes its stand on the kitchen" is creating all the bias, hatred and untouchability in our mindsets and not the Hinduism of Maha Upanishad that taught us the ideals of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Swami Vivekananda had warned us about the dangers of such religious prejudices. He said, "We are just 'Don't-touchists'. Our religion is in the kitchen. Our God is the cooking-pot, and our religion is 'Don't touch me, I am holy'. If this goes on for another century, every one of us will be in a lunatic asylum."

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

End of an era

Editor,

The sad demise of our former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has cast a pall of gloom in the entire nation. A man known for his honesty, integrity and profound moral uprightness, will forever remain as an iconic role model for the present and future politicians of India to emulate. In spite of his Sangh background, he still followed the age old tradition of respecting the country's rich plurality and diversity. His yeoman's role in resolving Kashmir dispute by developing cordial relationship between India and Pakistan, should act as an inspiration for both the country's politicians that disputes can be resolved and peace established, if they have the right effort and intention. Who can forget his famous lines on improving India-Pakistan relationship: "Itihas badal sakte hain, bhugol nahin" ie 'One can change History but not Geography.'

On Indian democracy he said, " No matter whichever government comes or goes, Indian democracy must thrive and prosper". With the current state of political affairs in India, one wonders if it will ever be possible to see a politician and visionary of the stature of Atalji in the future.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H.Laskar,
Guwahati.

Rights are not without responsibilities

Editor,

With rights come responsibilities; this is really a chicken and egg question as to which one comes first or to identify which of these is a priority. To me both rights and responsibilities are inseparable and cannot be seen as separate entities. It is difficult to enjoy any right without being responsible while exercising it. It is also difficult to be responsible if you are stripped of all your rights. Of all the rights that modern human society is proud of, I am most skeptical about the neo classical view of human rights and I find this to be truly intriguing. Would I like to have my human rights? Of course I do. However, the million dollar question is how responsible am I with my human rights. If a terrorist or an anti- social (like a rapist or a shooter) violates an individual's right, Human Right activists around the globe are sympathetic towards the aggressor and are vocal about protecting his/her human rights. But no one cares for the plight of the victim or the community that suffered due to an individual's irresponsible and unacceptable action. Hence I would like to ask whether that aggressor can enjoy any human rights while being irresponsible towards the society?

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

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"Even with all our technology and the inventions that make modern life so much easier than it once was, it takes just one big natural disaster to wipe all that away and remind us that, here on Earth, we're still at the mercy of nature."

-- Neil deGrasse Tyson

The Shillong Times

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Imran in the saddle

A new government is in place in Pakistan, and there is reason for cheer to neighbouring India too. Democracy asserted itself for the third time in succession since 2008, despite a tendency on the part of the military there to usurp power. Two prominent parties held sway for the past 10 years --the Pakistan People's Party coming into power in 2008, followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in 2013. Imran Khan, though seen as having close links to the military brass, is by now a powerful politician. He has shown the smartness to outwit the two established political parties and get his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf to power. The people of Pakistan can take pride in the fact that they have reinvented people's will and given a firm foundation to democracy.

It remains to be seen how much influence the army that ruled the nation for half of its Independent history since the historic Partition of 1947 would now relate to the new government. Notably, several of the new ministers had served in similar capacities in an army-run government in the past.

The new PM and his government are saddled with major issues. The previous government left a major burden on the nation, with half its foreign exchange reserves used up to pay back debts. An estimated $12 billion is required immediately to repay loans to China and others. The only way forward for Imran is to seek IMF loan; but it would come with strings attached. It would mean curtailing public expenses and austerity measures. The new PM would find it difficult to push his economic development plans. Khan's promise of a welfare state, as envisaged by Islam, would be hard to realise if he is not able to spend hugely on this count. However he's there to chart a new course in Pakistan's history, and could hopefully find ways and means to overcome the present crisis on the economic front.

What will be keenly watched is how he tackles the Indo-Pak relations since the bilateral ties are now at their worst. Imran Khan has gone on record to say he is ready to improve relations with India. The powerful army is unlikely to give Khan a free hand. How the new PM would negotiate his way through obstacles, if at all he desires to turn a new leaf, remains to be seen. The invitation extended to former cricketer and Punjab (Congress) minister Navjot Singh Sidhu for Imran's swearing in as PM must be seen from a positive light. Hopefully, Khan's personal friendship with Sidhu opens a new bridge between the two nations to open up channels of communication that should help both India and Pakistan.

What's the big deal?

Disaster management = disaster

By Poonam I Kaushish

God's Own Country Kerala resembles a disaster zone as floods swamp the State leaving over 200 killed, 2,23,000 living in 1568 relief camps as people hanker for relief. The story resounds across States as the deluge ravages cities, erases villages, sluices roads, damages crops, sweeps bodies, cripples train services, shut down airports, wrecks the economy bringing everything to a grinding halt. Mumbai yesterday, Kochi today, Chennai tomorrow, Kolkata, Guwahati next. Underscoring a stark reality: Government's fiasco and failure to prepare expertise in predicting rainfall intensity and its impact. Succinctly, disaster management is a disaster.

Thanks to Government's criminal casualness --- kaam chalao! Babudom's choord yaar attitude, unabated construction, insufficient cleaning of drains, encroachments of sprawling slums alongside rivers and streams, shoddy management of storm water drains, dug-up roads, no de-silting etc. Heavy development had destroyed green spaces and mangrove forests, its natural flood protection resulting in inadequate drainage system as no amount of man-made storm water drains can make up for natural drains. While the severity of the rains can be termed as an 'act of God', the mess, misery and damage is certainly man-made and mostly caused by human error.

An example. Tamil Nadu has witnessed 8 severe cyclones in 13 years so one expects the national and State disaster management teams would be hands-on to tackle the emergency. The reality: Zilch, as disaster preparedness is non-existent. There is no clear line of communication or coordination among State agencies involved in search and rescue operations, only families checking on each other.

Months of flooding in 13 States have caused huge economic losses and heaped misery on millions of people. Questionably, why is the country's preparedness for natural disasters so poor? Why are long-term responses not developed to what is an annual expected problem? Why aren't adequate arrangements made to ensure survivors don't die of starvation, due to the Administration's ineptitude. Do we know the ABC of disaster management? Are we inept or plain lazy bordering on the ke pharak painda hai attitude?

Till date 2,000 people have been killed and more than 42 million affected --displaced or stranded. Alas, our preparedness to deal with calamity is as rag-tag as ever. Far from having a defence system against elemental fury, the Central and State Governments seem to be banking on hope that any future disaster would not be as destructive as the last. Not for our polity implementation of basic suggestions and developing long-term responses.

Unfortunately, in a nation natured on short-cuts and quick-fix solutions, none knows anything about disaster management or finding lasting solutions. Let alone spell it, our netagan have, never even heard about it. They do not know the A,B,C,D of managing a crisis. More shocking, according to a report by the UN, India spends about $10 billion every year for crisis management. Could we spend this sum of money for disaster management?

"High time we transit quickly to preparedness-centric approach instead of continuing to be in the relief-centric mode and invest in better flood forecasting policy. One way environmentalists believe this could be improved is if evacuated people had safe structures on firm ground and not in flood plains; something authorities have not been able to ensure."

Across the globe disaster management is seen as an essential part of good governance and integral to development planning, not so in India. There is lack of know-how for assessing risks at local level, poor enforcement of standards and regulations and inadequate risk mitigation, no flood risk mapping concept and flood forecasting network. Add to this failure towards climate change mitigation and adaptation, lack of coordination and inadequate training at the ground level totals disaster in mitigating losses.

Besides, we have yet to understand the atypical relationship between development and disasters. Disasters can set back development even as post-disaster scenario provides new opportunities for development. Similarly, development can reduce vulnerability and yet, the same development can increase vulnerability.

Think. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was set-up amidst much fanfare with an ambitious three-layer (national, State and district) plan to decentralise disaster management right up to district levels and guidelines and policies were drawn to that effect. On paper: Good. On ground: Dud.

A 2013 scathing CAG report minced no words: The NDMA neither had information and control over progress of (disaster management-related) work at the State level nor was it successful in implementation of various projects. It is "ineffective in its functioning in most of the core areas." What's more, the Authority has been functioning without its core advisory committee of experts that advises it on different aspects of disaster management for the past three years!

Said a senior NDMA official, "The NDMA was bound to fail, as we were always a top-heavy organisation with many having no expertise in the realm of disaster. Worse, it is not performing several functions prescribed in the Disaster Management Act, 2005. No long-term responses have been developed, as it is assumed that by sanctions monies their job is done." Who will be held accountable? Whose head will roll?

Woefully, there are no emergency operations centres or trained personnel to search and rescue people. Shockingly, this is not due to lack of money, since 2010 till date the Central Government has budgeted over $5 billion to prepare for disasters with the Centre contributing 75%.

Experts aver due to global warming frequent and intense extreme weather events means India must improve its planning and reduce the potential impact of disasters before they occur. Communication and connectivity enhancement have become the need of the hour. Satellite images tell us about the affected areas during a calamity, but we need higher resolution images.

Towards that end, our leaders need to involve experts and environmentalists with a track record of research and policy making. Who would evaluate the ecological problems, study its context and be involved in decision and policy-making. With special emphasis on problems created by burgeoning population and its impact on the local eco-system, growth of hap-hazard housing, environmental insanitation and decay.

The problem is neither States nor Centre have a robust decision-support system. If the meteorological department indicates heavy rainfall, what are the implications? Who should be evacuated, and from where to where? We need to move from simple forecasting to impact forecasting and ensure information flows faster than the floodwater. In such situations, the communication system is the first to collapse.

High time we transit quickly to preparedness-centric approach instead of continuing to be in the relief-centric mode and invest in better flood forecasting policy. One way environmentalists believe this could be improved is if evacuated people had safe structures on firm ground and not in flood plains; something authorities have not been able to ensure.

Another is for States to build regional mutual-aid centres, with quick response teams as it is wasteful for each State to build parallel inventories, forecasting systems and teams as these are Alongside, flood destruction could be minimized if forecasting and mapping is accurate. However climate change complicates this as places which did not previously suffer floods are now experiencing unprecedented levels of rainfall.

True, Namo's response has been dabang till date, undertaking aerial surveys of affected districts and earmarking monies from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. But this is not enough. India needs to focus on long-term planning else without a shift in approach each disaster will continue to frustrate the Government and plague people.

Remember, desperate situations demand desperate action. The Government must stop playing pied piper. Life is not about collating statistics but flesh and blood. No longer can we ostrich-like bury our heads in the sand and wail, what's the big deal, disaster management never heard of it! ---- INFA

Bangladesh weighing impact of Assam NRC

Fundamentalist forces seek to rake up issue against India

By Barun Das Gupta

The publication of the National Register of Citizens in Assam has caused concern in Bangladesh for obvious reasons. Names of some 40 lakh people did not find place in the NRC and concerns were naturally raised about their future status as citizens. Although the date for inclusion of names "with proper documents to prove citizenship" has been extended, many fear that even in the revised NRC hundreds of thousands of people are likely to find their names missing. The BJP, from president Amit Shah down to the party's street fighters, are constantly saying that those who cannot prove their citizenship will be "sent back" to Bangladesh. But Bangladesh claims no citizen of theirs is illegally living in India and that they will not take back anyone sought to be pushed across the border as being an "illegal infiltrator" from Bangladesh.

"The situation created in India over the Bangladeshi issue has come in handy for these elements. Every statement by BJP leaders on sending back Bangladeshis is used by her opponents to weaken her position."

How Bangladesh is viewing the developing situation in its neighbouring Indian state of Assam? The Bangladesh government and its press have accepted that the NRC is an "internal matter" of India. But behind this formal position there lurks a fear about the possible next move of India. Will the Indian authorities really herd lakhs of people on the Bangladesh border and try to push them in?

The Bangladesh press has maintained commendable restraint on the way the 'Bangladeshi' issue is being handled in India. But the press has expressed concern that it is the Bengali-speaking Muslims who are being 'unfortunately' branded as "illegal Bangladeshis." The Independent has commented that "Bangladesh has nothing to do with the issue." But The Daily Star was more forthright in expressing its concern. It said the development (NRC and its fall out) may have "dangerous implications like that of the Rohingya crisis."

Indeed, the political storm over driving out 'Bangladeshi infiltrators' has burst in India at a time when the government of Sheikh Hasina is going through trying times. The recent student protests in Dhaka against killings of pedestrians by speeding vehicles and the strong-arm methods adopted by the Awami League government to suppress the movement in an election year have alienated the people, especially the students, from the government.

It started on July 29 when two schoolchildren in Dhaka – a boy and a girl – were run over and killed on the spot by two speeding buses trying to overtake each other for picking up passengers. Such accidents are regular in a big city like Dhaka but this accident evoked mass protest from the student community. Tens of thousands of school students poured on to the streets of Dhaka, stopping all vehicles and blocking the main thoroughfares. Life in the capital city came to a standstill.

The police used their usual methods to break the movement. The students, the public and the press also complained that members of the student wing of the ruling Awami League and the 'goons' patronised by the ruling party had also set upon the students and beaten them up. Matters came to a head when Shadhul Alam, a photojournalist, was picked up by the police on August 5, allegedly for giving an interview to Al Jazeera TV in which he strongly criticised the Bangladesh government for the ham-handed way it had dealt with the protesting students. Shahidul's arrest further inflamed the students and came in for sharp criticism by the media.

All these developments in an election year cannot but be a matter of grave concern for the Sheikh Hasina government and her party, the Awami League. In such a situation when the leaders of the BJP, including Amit Shah, repeatedly talk about their intention to drive "all illegal 'Bangladeshis" back to Bangladesh, it cannot but embarrass Sheikh Hasina. Her political opponents – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Begum Khaleda Zia, the Jamaat-e-Islami and all fundamentalist forces – have dubbed her and her government as stooges of India.

The situation created in India over the Bangladeshi issue has come in handy for these elements. Every statement by BJP leaders on sending back Bangladeshis is used by her opponents to weaken her position.

The Bangladesh issue has a wider implication. The Modi government's foreign policy during the past four and a half years has seen most of our neighbours slowly drifting away from us and veering to China. Nepal has not forgotten the five month long blockade by India (India said it was done by the Madheshis of Nepal) which brought its economy on the verge of collapse. The present government in Nepal headed by Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli has made it clear that his government will maintain "strict neutrality" between the two big neighbours, India and China. The 'tilt' is definitely away from India and forging closer ties with China.

Among our other neighbours, Maldives is positively hostile to India. Seychelles refused permission to India to build a naval base in one of its islands. In Sri Lanka, former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party are gradually recovering lost ground. His pro-China inclinations are well known. It is because of the stiff opposition of his party in the Sri Lankan parliament that it took a long time for Colombo to hand over the operations of the Mattala airport to India.

Even tiny Bhutan is insisting that it be allowed to establish direct diplomatic relations with Beijing.

In the circumstances, Bangladesh remains our only neighbour with which we have excellent friendly relations. Constant talk about driving lakhs of alleged 'Bangladeshis` into Bangladesh can only turn Bangladesh against India. The myopic leaders of the BJP, who see every issue through the communal prism, may not understand the larger implications of the Bangladeshi bogy. But the Prime Minister is expected to be aware of the sensitiveness of the issue. Two years ago, Bangladesh acquired two submarines from China. It sent alarm bells ringing in Delhi. It also sent a message to India – Bangladesh cannot be taken for granted. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

A fishy affair!

Editor,

The other day, I visited some ponds located at Umsning, Ri Bhoi District and found that almost 200-300 kgs of fish were available in each pond. I was quite impressed that at least we are really on the road to self sufficiency in fish production. But to my utter dismay, when I again visited the same ponds the next morning, I was amazed that the same amount of fish were available when the previous morning the ponds were almost empty.

So, it happens only in Meghalaya where fish are grown overnight. Or one may conclude that there must be foul play where local Assam fish are thrown overnight into these ponds and in the morning the fish become local Meghalaya fish. If this is the case, then this masquerade was done deliberately with the connivance of both Assam and Meghalaya traders to avoid attraction of the ban imposed on all the imported fish from outside the State which includes Assam. Well this is an offence and the punishment for the same is seven years imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs ten lakhs as per government order.

As such, one hopes that the Government of Meghalaya take notes of this trickery which tantamount to black marketing of fish while fish traders of Iewduh are left to rot and suffer. Will the Government machinery wake up to this crisis?

Yours etc.,
Helen Dkhar,
via email

Secret Mission of HS Shylla

Editor,

Ever since Mr. H.S. Shylla (Jaintia by birth) assumed charge as CEM, KHADC the Khasi Lineage Bill has come to the limelight only to clear his previous sins of corruption and misadventures visà-vis uranium mining in Meghalaya. Technically, Shylla is not a Khasi but a Jaintia so how can he hold the post of CEM in KHADC which is meant for Khasis only. This is uncalled for. For Jaintias there is the JHADC for them to contest from and be elected. Mr PN Syiem please take note of this.

There was an agreement between the Hynniewtrep Youth Council Chief Robert June Kharjahrin who is himself a non Khasi (but became one by virtue of "tang jait;" hence the clan name Kharjahrin) and HS Shylla to win the sentiments of the indigenous community to make an issue of lineage and uranium. It is pertinent to mention how Mr. H.S. Shylla appointed Robert June Kharjahrin as his legal advisor when he heads an NGO. Does the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) have no objection to this? Why has HS Shylla come out of nowhere to become the messiah of the Jaidbynriew? He has taken crores of rupees from the Government of India for uranium mining and today he is going along with the NGOs to the site and declaring that the uranium mining chapter is closed. Khasi people cannot forget this chapter Mr Shylla. The uranium chapter cannot be closed. Rather a CBI enquiry must be initiated into the corruption indulged in by KHADC in the name of uranium and other projects.

Meanwhile Robert June Kharjahrin has been given the task of countering the pressure groups opposing the Lineage Bill. He is the mastermind in the making the new group "STIEH." Purity Phawa is a member of "Magnessa International" which collects s money from the public and makes claims that the money will be doubled. Nini Kurbah is members of the HYC Women's Wing and works in NEIGHRIMS as a contract employee at the reception. B.L. Nonglait is related to the late H.S. Lyngdoh. The above-mentioned ladies are entrusted to make this new group. Rupees five lakhs was allegedly given to Robert June Kharjahrin to push the agenda of HS Shylla. My parents are Khasi; my father is Lyngdoh and my mother is Rynjah. I worked as KSU member during Paul Lyngdoh'stenure as President. I also support the Lineage Bill but a more thorough study and consultation is required in this regard so that no confusion will prevail in the future.

Last but not the least, I advice Mr HS Shylla to conduct a DNA test of himself because his looks and appearance seems to be different from the indigenous tribals of Meghalaya.. I humbly request the KSU to not fall into the trap of HS Shylla and HYC which is a breakaway group of KSU. I personally fully support the Lineage Bill but only if its spirit and intent is clear.

Yours etc.,
Lamkupar Rynjah
Ex-KSU Unit President
Shillong-2

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"The achievement of your goal is assured the moment you commit yourself to it."

--- Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

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Kerala floods- Any lessons learnt?

Ecologist Madhav Gadgil, who headed the Western Ghats Ecological Expert Panel (WGEEP) constituted in 2011 had warned that several areas coming under the Western Ghats should be classified as ecologically sensitive. The Kerala Government had, however opposed the panel's recommendation. The result is there for all to see. Nature's fury knows no bounds. And nature has claimed some hapless victims even as the state undergoes an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Gadgil who founded the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru in his report on the Western Ghats in Kerala had recommended strict restrictions on mining and quarrying and on use of land for non-forest purposes. Gadgil terms the recent floods in Kerala a "man-made calamity."He blames a defective and irresponsible environmental policy for it. The rapidly changing landscape of Kerala, marked by several high rises, not seen before, should have forewarned any climatologist about the impending disaster. But governments everywhere are known to succumb to the mining lobby that funds elections and pays for other private expenses of politicians too.

Coming to Meghalaya, the situation here too is grave what with mountain slopes and pristine community forests giving way to buildings even while aquifers and catchments are destroyed through reckless quarrying. Many rivers have run dry on account of relentless sang banking activities. As far as coal mining is concerned, the National Green Tribunal has for the time being put a stop to this extractive and destructive practice but for how long? The longest cave systems in Asia located in the Jaintia Hills have all been acquired by private individuals who don't see caves as repositories of geological, historical and ecological wisdom. They see these limestone caves only as resources to be exploited. It is instructive that mining of coal and limestone and the setting up of cement companies on forest land is treated as normal. It took the Supreme Court to step in and take cognizance of this willful default and connivance between cement companies and State Forest Department officials and to bring in the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) through the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Government of India, to make the Companies compensate for the forest land they have encroached on. But the destruction of the neighbouring forest areas outside the reserved forests continue unabated. It is only a matter of time before nature fights back. But the consequences then would be more than the state can handle. Does anyone care?

Khasi Lineage Bill - Why Target Women?

By M Kharsyntiew

The Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill 2018 has shaken the Khasi foundation with a tectonic force like never before. Even as we read this, debates on this issue is alive in many Khasi kitchens and living rooms, street corners and bye-lanes, coffee shops and restaurants. Every individual of every thinking Khasi family has something to say on this matter ... some simplistic and direct, and some argumentative. Every Khasi person concerned with their well being is pouring forth their concerns and opinions either in public domain and print media for all to see, or in muted silence in the privacy of their homes at this definitive moment kick-started by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council CEM, Mr HS Shylla.

In one sweeping stroke the Council, under the CEM's guidance, blackened and tarred the faces of Khasi womenfolk accusing them of bringing catastrophic misfortune to the Khasi community. His acerbic allegation is that our fairer sex is prone to and/or are indulging in benami businesses with non tribal men specifically through marriage. Women have always borne the brunt of male subjugation by means of planned craftiness or by sheer might. But, in the annals of world history, I am yet to find another parallel of such preposterous singling out of its own womenfolk

for all its ills and misfortunes by any other community ... male centric or otherwise. Kudos to the Khasi community for hitting a 'First!' The fuming rage in the condemnation of any Khasi personality debating against the motion at this juncture points to the great rot that has set in amongst the Khasi people. Rationality of thought is being thrown to the winds. It is a sad reflection of our society that Khasi male pride has degenerated to such levels of fear that they now kick the very wombs that have successfully propagated the tribe for centuries.

However, taking stock of the current situation, initiatives must be taken to find out the percentage population of non-tribal men and Khasi women marriage alliances. This should not be difficult since the government has with it updated voters' lists in digitized form of all constituencies of East Khasi Hills District and also of the entire state. Census must be carried out to find out the number of businesses carried out by non-tribal males in their Khasi wives names. This work also should not be of any difficulty since the Rangbah Shnongs of all localities know of such families residing in their areas. Such statistics are imperative and of prime importance to reach definitive conclusions. However unregistered marriages of conveniences cannot be stopped by any Council.

During my childhood days I used to accompany my grandmother to lewduh. This market was a buyers' delight. Spices, vegetables, heaps of hand milled rice, fruits, beef, pork, chicken. You name it was there. All generally manned by traders of Khasi origin. The time I speak of was when Meghalaya was a part of Assam. This marketplace has always been under the aegis and sanctity of the Syiem of Mylliem. Now what has happened after Meghalaya was born? How have

Non tribals taken over this sacred market? Can the KHADC answer? Can the CEM say all the non tribal traders of lewduh have Khasi wives? Or can the CEM say that all the business premises in lewduh belong to Khasi women only and are being run by their non-Khasi/ non-tribal husbands? What percent of the stalls belong to Khasi males and how many of them are sublet to non-tribals? How is it that the District Councils during the Assam period was more effective in protecting tribal rights then than now that we have our own people at helm of affairs. Does it not stink somewhere? Some say that the Autonomous District Councils in Meghalaya have become as redundant as the human appendix.

Even while accepting the fact that Khasi women are to be blamed for such serious misdemeanours, are they to be crucified like Jesus without any judicious hearing. Like Pontius Pilate, can the CEM, Mr H.S. Shylla just wash his hands and say there are no Judases in the Khasi community? Let there be a fact finding committee to delve into the numbers of Khasi indigenous males who have lent their names to non-tribal contractors. Scan the paper trails in various PWD, PHE, Health, MUDA, Supply, Excise and other Govt Departments. Let there be a fact finding committee to delve into how non-tribals get trading licenses from the District Councils and how many of those have Khasi wives responsible for holding such licenses. Let there be a fact finding committee to delve into the number of times non-tribals have been benefitted with mega projects in Meghalaya and how many women ministers vis-a-vis males of the Khasi community were involved in granting such permissions. Let there be a fact finding committee to confirm how many shops belonging to the Khasi male community have been sub-let to non- tribals in the Meghalaya Urban Affairs Department, Khyndailad, East Khasi Hills District, and also are all such shops having Khasi women owners or Khasi women who have non-tribal husbands.

As in lewduh, in the MUDA Shopping Complex, Khyndailad, most of the shops are leased out to Khasi males. Now who will dare table a bill to ostracize these Khasi males who have sublet their stalls to non tribals and are thereby involved in benami transactions and businesses .. Let there be a fact finding committee to delve into the affairs of the Supply Dept. to ascertain how many Khasis are selling their names to non-tribals and what percentage of them are Khasi men. Let there be a fact finding committee to delve into the number of timber mills (legal and illegal) in the Khasi hill District to find how many of them are benami and what percent of the Khasi Timber Mill owners are Khasi women. Let there be a fact finding committee to delve into how many wine store licenses have been bartered away to non-tribals by Khasi males. I will prudently say that more than fifty percent of the culprits doing benami business will be the Khasi males. Can the HS Shylla led Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council even dare to expose and legally ostracize these Khasi Judases with the arrogance and impertinence demonstrated in demeaning the Khasi womenfolk?

For reasons that need no guesswork his answer will be a resounding "NO". The administrative authorities, be the government or the KHADC, must come out with a white paper on all the above. The Government of the day must place the findings of the above for scrutiny in the public domain, failing which grave injustice would have been done to the womenfolk of our community. And if judicious enquiries are not their forte for fear or otherwise, then let the Income Tax Department or the CBI be entrusted to bring forth the data for the public to peruse.

There are a gamut of laws to check benami businesses. Full page adverts are placed in newspapers warning the public of benami practices and of the resultant penalties but have the KHADC or the government (Central or State) authorities ever tried to implement them with any degree of eagerness? Had they done so such a pass would not have come to scar the Khasi womenkind.

The insinuations that Khasi women entering into wedlock with non-tribal men is the root cause of all Khasi ills has to be judicially examined by His Excellency, the Governor of Meghalaya, now that the Bill is lying with his Excellency. And if Khasi women marrying non-tribal men are singularly at fault for all the alleged ills of the Khasi community then the Bill should be passed. If not then the allegations brought forward by the CEM must be withdrawn and the Khasi women so insulted must be exonerated and their honour returned by the KHADC.

Public memory is short but it is worth mentioning that during his last stint as CEM, KHADC, in 2006, the same HS Shylla was a votary for granting Uranium mining rights to the UCIL even when the Khasi community did not wish so. Why he did do so? No one has, till date, unraveled the mystery. And ,this time round, he conjures forth this agenda purportedly to save the Khasi community from being erased from the face of the earth. Now, for his part the CEM must be answerable to the jaidbynriew and take his baby, The Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill, 2018, to the truthful and logical conclusion for the benefit of every member of the Khasi community. Or else, of Mr HS Shylla we will have the future children of our tribe asking, "Who was he?"

Malayali greed has come home to roost

Unprecedented flood devastation is entirely man-made

By K. Raveendran

Nothing should take precedence over relief and rescue operations in the unprecedented devastation brought by overflowing dams and torrential rains in Kerala, claiming over 300 lives and displacing over 2 lakh people from their homes. Over 1,500 relief camps have been opened. It was as though the moment of truth has arrived for Malayalis, with people used to driving down in luxury cars being put in large cooking vessels and pushed to safety; women and children hauled up on the upper floors of their premium homes sending desperate SOS messages on social media to save their lives and inhabitants of posh localities trying to grab a piece of loaf hurled at them by rescue workers.

It is no time for a blame game. And yet it may be not be inappropriate to do a reality check. The agonising experience has put the fear of God back into the Malayali mind, which he had long exchanged for material and matter. And God, who had lost his own country to the usurpers, seems to have snatched it back with a vengeance, if at all He ever gets into such ferocious moods. Just as the nature's fury leveled hills and settlements, it also punctured mountain-sized egos, which had become the trademark of every Malayali. He is being made to learn the lesson of his life that no amount of riches or luxury accessories can save him from nature's fury, which makes no distinction between the glitzy glass tower and the ramshackle shed down below.

Kerala ceased to be the much-touted 'God's Own Country', an empty slogan employed by tour operators to attract tourists to the state. Rather it became the abode of devils as the materially-empowered Malayali began to buy everything with his money.

To fathom the depth of Malayali's sense of devastation, a bit of historical perspective will be in order. Thanks to the visionary zeal of great men of intellectual calibre, early exposure to communism and liberal thought inculcated a spirit of questioning in the Malayali psyche and he began to challenge every established order of the day, social, political or economic. This helped the Kerala society to pull down social barriers and fetters to individual liberty so much so that the state had one of the most egalitarian societies when the rest of India was still passing through the dark ages of obscurantism. Much before the rest of India's Dalits could even enter places of worship run by upper caste Hindus, Kerala's so-called 'untouchables' became priests in prestigious temples. Any Hindu could become a professional poojari by becoming certified through a public examination. Similarly, the Malayali made tremendous achievements through the organizational strength of unity.

But unfortunately, over time, whatever made all these achievements possible began to boomerang on him. The Malayali carried the spirit of questioning too far and did not seem to know where to stop. He challenged everything, including the need to maintain order to achieve progress. And it led to a kind of anarchy so that anybody with the backing of an organisation could bargain his way through to achieve any demand, and it did not matter how it impacted others. Similarly, the principle of equality was overstretched to the extent that no one considered himself or herself to be less equal than anybody else. So everyone was a law unto oneself and disorder became the only order. And the Malayali embraced a new materialistic culture in which nothing other than self-aggrandizement mattered.

Kerala ceased to be the much-touted 'God's Own Country', an empty slogan employed by tour operators to attract tourists to the state. Rather it became the abode of devils as the materially-empowered Malayali began to buy everything with his money. And he came up with ingenious ways to make more and more of it. Much before Modi had embarked on his demonetization plan, Keralites had already devalued God and reduced Him into a commodity that the highest bidder could take home with no strings attached.

Malayali's greed found no bounds as he made everything subservient to his interests. No law or authority was strong enough to face up to his avarice. Forests were cut down to build concrete jungles so that he could sell them and make more money; rock mountains were flattened to produce stones to build his high-rises and rivers were killed to create waterfront properties, which sold at a premium. All this was done in the name of progress and development, unmindful of the fact that it was destroying the fragile eco-system, which spread across a major part of the state. Those who were supposed to fight the violations, including the ruling establishment, joined the act and became partners in the crime.

When a team headed by Madhav Gadgil, ecologist and founder of the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, submitted a report recommending strong measures to protect the sensitive Western Ghat region by declaring an area extending to 140,000 kilometres as requiring special protection, including strong restrictions on mining and quarrying, use of land for non forest purposes and construction of high rises, he was hounded out as an environmental prankster and a mad man pushing someone's agenda. The Kerala government outrightly rejected the recommendations, without adopting even the most innocuous among them.

It is rather poetic justice that most of the regions devastated by the current monsoon fury are the ones Gadgil and his team had classified as ecologically-sensitive zones. In fact, reacting to the unprecedented suffering the state is currently undergoing, Gadgil described it as a man-made calamity and blamed it on the irresponsible environmental policy of the government. With a government headed by a chief minister who is a reluctant learner himself, it is a bit too much to expect a change of heart on the part of the ruling establishment, as it has deeply-entrenched interests that align with those of the land and construction mafia. That is not at all a comforting thought for the hapless Malayali, facing an existential crisis. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Attempt to divide the Khasi community?

Editor,

Apropos the letter by Lamkupar Rynjah (ST August 21, 2018) I personally feel that his opinions on the Khasi identity are totally outrageous. The Khasi Students' Union ever since its inception has been championing and voicing the cause and unity of the Khasi community. It is a known fact that different sub groups viz the Khynriams, the Pnars, the Bhois, the Wars, etc constitutes this unique ethnic community known as Khasi to the outside world. It is also natural that each and every member of the Khasi community will pride himself/ herself of being a member of a particular sub group or clan. A Pnar will be proud of his/ her heritage or the glory of the erstwhile Sutnga kingdom to name a few. Similarly a Bhoi will feel dignified when the rich and variant culture of the Bhoi region is mentioned. At the end of the day everyone will be proud of whom he/she is or where he/she is from, except if that someone is suffering from low self esteem.

If we look and research on the different sub groups that make up the Khasi community we will find that they shared almost entirely the same aspects with regards to language, history, mythology, religion, polity, physical traits, origin, customs, etc. It is worth noting that the policy of divide and rule is also being experimented on the Khasis by former colonial rulers as well as adversaries of the Khasi community which is still lingering on to this very day.

Mr. Rynjah's letter tends to subscribe to the devious divide and rule policy practiced by the British Raj. As a matter of fact, his comments on the Jaintias hold no water because Jaintia is the name of the region or to be precise, a kingdom. A Khynriam, a Pnar and a War can identify himself/herself as a Jaintia if he/she is from the Jaintia region.

If Mr. Lamkupar Rynjah wishes to air his views, he can do so in a democratic country, but why does he have to mention that he is an ex-KSU activist? Is what he is mentioning reflecting the objectives and ideologies of the KSU? On the contrary he is placing the Khasi community, the KSU, a few individuals and himself in a very poor light or maybe he is practicing a divide and rule policy by trying to create a wedge between the KSU and others by adding the tag 'ex KSU' to his name.

Finally, I can state here that Mr. Rynjah, through his writings, fails to absorb a few of the basic commitments and obligations that every true and loyal KSU member holds to his/her heart, such as: Strive for the overall empowerment and unity of the Khasi community; refrain from simply hiding behind a pen and a paper or a keyboard, one should act as well; abstain from peeking into the personal lives of others (womenfolk to be specific in this case).

Yours etc.,
(Donald V. Thabah)
General Secretary
Khasi Students' Union

MUDA office without staff

Editor,

The Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA) has a unit at Byrnihat primarily to assist the residents of the area with building permissions etc., But for the past several months the MUDA office at Byrnihat has not been functioning. Whenever we have gone there to meet with the officers and staff for building permissions we are told by the fourth grade staff there (chowkidar and cleaners) that the administrative staff are not available. On further enquiry we were informed that the TPO is holding dual posts for Shillong and Byrnihat and that all permissions and other administrative work will be conducted from Shillong. We are also told that the officers and staff of the MUDA unit of Byrnihat are now based out of Shillong. This defeats the purpose of setting up the MUDA unit at Byrnihat. It also makes it very difficult for us from this area to travel all the way to Shillong to apply for permission for construction of residential building etc. Without the permission from MUDA the banks refuse to grant us house building loans.

We therefore seek the urgent intervention of the Minister Urban Affairs on this matter and request him to ensure that the MUDA office at Byrnihat becomes fully functional, otherwise why have an office here in the first place?

Yours etc.,
SR Khongjoh,
15 Mile Byrnihat

Meaningless exercise

Editor,

A pictorial warning saying, 'Quit Today' to be inserted on cigarette and tobacco packs from September 1 was recently announced by the Ministry of Health, Government of India. A helpline number to help people quit the poison will apparently be added alongside the new warning. For decades now, tobacco and cigarette packs have been warning people of the ill effects of consuming it through photos of affected people and a warning 'Tobacco causes cancer'. I fail to understand how any of the previous warnings or the photos have been able to bring about a change in tobacco consumption, or how any of the changes in those photos or new warnings will change the extent to which people consume the poison, namely tobacco. Today, people are attracted more to what is inside the packet rather than what is written on it. I have observed many people purchasing a packet of tobacco or a box of cigarettes but I have never seen them concentrating on any of the instructions or the warnings on the packet. Tobacco is easily available and so cheap that no one has second thoughts about purchasing it..

What is The Ministry of Health trying to portray here? Why are there no steps being taken to minimise the production of cigarettes and other tobacco products and eventually stopping them from being sold in India ? Why is tobacco even being supplied? When people have not paid attention to the pack earlier, how can the Ministry of Health expect phone calls from the consumers? While this is a humble step towards prevention, is this all that it would take for a tobacco addict to stop consuming it hereafter?

Yours etc.,
Avantika Sharma
Via email

"My love is conditional. I cannot deviate from my first love — Manipur and her people. I will go away for love only if the people abandon me, or absolutely ignore me."

-- Irom Sharmila

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AFSPA issue resurfaces

356 army personnel including 74 officers filed a petition at the Supreme Court against the alleged dilution of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). The SC had asked for the constitution of a special investigation team by the CBI to look into 1582 alleged cases of extra-judicial killings between 2000 and 2012 in Manipur and J & K. In J & K an army officer fired at an alleged stone- pelter killing 3 persons. Human rights violations raise their ugly heads every now and again in these conflict zones. The petition by army officers seems unfair in that context. Elected governments are influenced by political considerations. The army should not act as a pressure group in defence of its actions. The petition is a violation of the Army Act too. Serving personnel of the Army cannot form unions, attend meetings and take part in demonstrations organised for political or other purposes. The AFSPA provides immunity to Army personnel involved in counter-insurgency operations. Very often the AFSPA has encouraged a climate of impunity as has been carefully documented by human rights activists in Manipur. Sometimes the narratives when they do come out are of unspeakable violence inflicted by army personnel even on women. The case of Thangjam Manorama is a case in point. There are many others that are not documented. The mass graves in Shopian, Kashmir also send shivers down the spine.

The army in a counter-insurgency area is not fighting the enemy but its own people. This is the dichotomy when the army is used to combat counter-insurgency. They are trained to tackle the enemy; not their own people. They have also often represented their case saying that if they are to be in a counter-insurgency operation they cannot go there with their hands tied. They need the AFSPA to protect them. Now how the AFSPA is used is another. The Jeevan Reddy Commission had recommended scrapping of this colonial Act. Questions have been raised about whether the AFSPA is consistent with constitutional democracy. It is unfortunate that the Jeevan Reddy Commission Report is now cold-storaged and its recommendations ignored.

Army personnel going to court is somewhat bizarre and a new but unfortunate development. And to ask for the continuance of an Act that is colonial and perpetuates a cycle of violence and therefore alienates the people of Kashmir and the North East even more, is even more disheartening. The Supreme Court needs to take a judicious call on this matter.

South Tura - a historical by-election

By Albert Thyrniang

South Tura will be voting for their MLA today, August 23. This will be a historical election since one of the candidates is already the Chief Minister of Meghalaya. Four candidates are in the fray for this all important election. Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma from the NPP, Charlotte W Momin of the Congress, John Leslee K Sangma and Chris Kabul A Sangma (the last two are independent candidates) complete the list. Campaigns, ever since the EC announced the date for South Tura election on July 23, have been low-key. Street corner meetings and house to house campaigns were favoured methods for the contestants.

Though subdued the campaign journey witnessed quite a few controversies. Former ANVC-B chairman Bernard Rimpu N Marak accused former legislator John Leslee K Sangma of misappropriation of funds under SUWP projects and alleged that beneficiaries are mainly his close aides and the work remains incomplete. The former MLA who was forced to forfeit his security deposit in the last election robustly denied all allegations of funds misappropriation stating that projects under SUWP were not under his jurisdiction and threatened the former rebel chief of legal action for defamation.

The independent candidate, who resigned from NCP to fight the election was also show- caused by the Election Commission for allegedly indulging in inflammatory speeches against Agatha Sangma and her late father PA Sangma, calling him a Hindu convert during one of his campaigns for the by-election. The aspirant who lost to Agatha in the February election denied all allegations made by his adversary, the NPP. A few days later it was his turn to petition the EC that the Chief Minister and his brother James Sangma violated the model code of conduct by campaigning beyond permissible hours and for promising more funds for a road when the funds for its construction had already been sanctioned.

The election to the 51 - South Tura (ST) Constituency is necessitated by the resignation of Agatha Sangma who 'sacrificed' her seat for her elder brother Conrad Sangma. Conrad who is currently Member, Lok Sabha has to win the seat to retain his chief ministerial status. Hence it is important that he wins this crucial election. If not his government will collapse and probably the Congress will lead the new coalition government under whatever name. Political equations will completely change. Needless to say therefore that this election is the most crucial for the NPP. It is critical also for the Congress because if its candidate upsets the formidable CM, the old grand party will have a shot at power, yet again.

Before Agatha resigned, Conrad Sangma and the Garo Hills NPP think tank had done its homework. One of the smart moves was to convince former legislator Billy Kid A Sangma, who was a close runner up to Agatha in the last election, to not only opt out of the race but to support the candidature of the NPP boss. The BJP member actively moved from door to door encouraging the electorate to vote for the Conrad Sangma 'for the sake of development'. It may also be noted that the other South Tura political candidates, Bernard Rimpu N Marak and Jingjang Marak also opted out of the race this time around. The former publicly pledged his support to the NPP National President. Whether the support was voluntary or the NPP approached him for the move, one cannot confirm. Whether or not the decision will benefit the NPP candidate will only be known after analysing the results, post August 25.

The Conrad Sangma has had to clarify his 'Reservation and Bangladeshi' controversial remarks everywhere and every time he campaigned. His rivals, former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma who aggressively campaigned for the Congress candidate, Charlotte W Momin and the independent candidate John Lesley pounced on the statement of the Chief Minister in the Assembly that the Reservation Policy does not include quota in technical, medical and engineering studies courses. His opponents were also quick to take advantage of the proposal that Bangladeshi labourers could be given work permit in the state. They interpreted it as an open invitation to influx. Conrad Sangma on his part, pointed out that work permit to Bangladeshis was a mere suggestion; he vehemently clarified that he would not allow the current Reservation Policy to be vitiated.

There is also a fight on the ideological front. The Congress and other candidates point to the nexus between the NPP and the BJP. They say the close links between the two is evident by now. The BJP supported the NPP in the Ampati by-election in May. The saffron party has also not put up candidate against the NPP in Ranikor, the by-election of which will also take place simultaneously with the South Tura one. Anti- NPP candidates still remind the citizens of the euphoria that the BJP created at the swearing in ceremony of the new CM in March this year though the party won just two seats. The venue for the swearing-in ceremony was adorned with saffron colour; the BJP flags fluttered in the Shillong streets. These clearly show that the NPP is under the control of the communal party, they allege. They also point to the dangers of right wing ideology in the state if the BJP is allowed to spread its wings in Meghalaya.

There is one woman among the four candidates and she is a Congress candidate. This too might be seen as somewhat controversial. Many allege it is a game played by the Congress to score brownie points. In the last election the NPP urged the voters, particularly women and women's groups to vote for Agatha Sangma. Now the Congress insists that since in the last election a woman was elected, this time also a woman should represent the constituency. Whether this strategy will succeed or not remains to be seen.

As always, all the candidates speak of development in their campaigns. If elected they will ensure over- all development was the constant refrain. This is a stereotypical catch-phrase and may not mean anything. Since no candidate has specifically identified (at least I am not aware of them) what developmental work they intend to take up in South Tura if elected, let me name a few. Any development work also has to include North Tura because you cannot separate the town into two in terms of development. Moreover, the representatives of North and South Tura need to work in tandem to ensure development of this hilly municipal town which is the cultural, administrative, political, business, educational and religious centre of Garo Hills.

Roads need immediate attention. The Paikan-Tura National High Way has become narrower and narrower from Rongram (15 km) as one approaches Tura. Before Rongram the highway is a two lane road but after Rongram it becomes a single-lane one. Why? The roads in Tura town are nowhere comparable to Shillong Roads. Even in the heart of Tura you don't see a first class road. In all localities roads are in poor condition. There is no proper drainage system. The roads have remained the same as they were 25-30 years ago when I first saw Tura.

Acute water scarcity needs resolution. Come January, February, March and April you will see the crisis. Makeshift tankers ply in all directions of the town. While private tankers ferry water you also see PHE water flowing out of broken pipes arranged haphazardly. While owners of private tankers (probably in collusion with some PHE officials) make quick and big bucks the general public suffer immensely due to severe water shortage for three to four months in winter and spring every year.

Sports lovers wonder why there is such a lack of sports infrastructure in the second largest town in the state. The de facto capital of Garo Hills has hardly any sporting facility. As football is by far the most popular sport, footballers and football enthusiasts are surprised that there is not even a single artificial turf here while Shillong has at least three, Mawkyrwat one, Nongstoin one and Jowai one. The Dikki Bandi stadium (formerly known as MP stadium) is in such a bad condition, with zero maintenance, so much so that neither football nor other athletic events can be seriously organised. And why on earth should a world class stadium be built in Ampati. For all intents and purposes it should have been built in Tura. Politics got the better of other considerations. Really unfortunate!

On 23rd the 30,440 voters of South Tura will decide not only the fate of the four candidates but the Government of the state itself. Will South Tura accept Conrad K Sangma as Chief Minister of Meghalaya or will it reject him? Will the Meghalaya Progressive Alliance (MPA) government carry on with its ruling streak or are its days counted? Will the result be on expected lines or will there be surprises? Whatever be the case South Tura will make history.

Vajpayee's Foreign Policy

Blend of realism & restraint

By Dr. D. K. Giri

Atal Bihari Vajpayee left deep footprints on Indian politics in the six decades of his political activism. A great deal has been written about his rich legacy by his associates and observers. It is perhaps in order that we recall his unique contribution to India's foreign policy as he began his Ministerial stints as Foreign Minister in 1977-79 in the government led by Morarji Desai. Twenty years later he became the Prime Minister for six years, from 1998 to 2004 deftly guiding foreign affairs.

Vajpayee's foreign policy was a wonderful blend of realism and restraint. He was conscious of the need for India to be on the world stage as a great power to reckon with, at the same time, he was aware that India should deal with its smaller neighbours with restraint, not to indulge in over-reach or chest-thumping. He was also conscious of the RSS world view and positioning India, as well as the Nehruvian legacy of idealism, non-alignment, fence-sitting, etc.

Vajpayee, in fact, discarded both, and created his own approach to India's foreign policy. He repudiated the 'exclusionary nationalism' of RSS that fragmented the domestic basis of national power drawn from Hindutva canons, and Nehruvian isolationism drawn from non-alignment, by declaring that India and America are natural allies; non-alignment is antithetical to alliance making.

During 1977-79, Vajpayee was the Foreign Minister. He brought creativity and intellectual flair into the foreign office, much to the chagrin of the conservative foreign policy establishment. He was the first Cabinet minister to visit China, two decades after Prime Minister Nehru had been. He surprised his Chinese counterpart as he announced that "the border problems should not constitute a hindrance to improving our bilateral relations." That was an offer of friendship, although Chinese did not reciprocate then with equal warmth and sincerity. Vajpayee did not give up.

In order to regain the prestige while retaining the autonomy in foreign policy making, his Janata government recalibrated non-alignment as "genuine non-alignment". A journalist once asked him in a press conference, "Foreign Minister, are you tilted towards America or Soviet Union?" Vajpayee quipped, "I am not tilted anyway, please watch, I am standing straight." Vajpayee, for the first time as Indian Minister spoke in the United Nations in Hindi, a symbolic manifestation of Indian nativism.

It may be recalled that relationship with our neighbours, especially Pakistan was at its best during Janata period. An anecdote goes that, when Morarji Desai, then Prime Minister came to know of Zia-ul-Haq's plan to expand his army, he telephoned Zia and said, "General, why are you spending money on expanding the army, if your country is ever under attack, my army will be at your disposal." That heartwarming gesture by Morarji melted General Zia. No wonder Morarji was given the highest honour of Pakistan, Shan-e-Pakistan. Behind such friendly posturing, was the Foreign Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Twenty years later, Vajpayee became the Prime Minister with greater power and determination to reshape India's foreign policy. Three initiatives taken by him during his premiership were outstanding - the second nuclear test in 1998, the Kargil war of 1999, and the outreach to Pakistan. Vajpayee, as soon as he took over as Prime Minister, went from conducting the six nuclear tests announcing India's presence in the world as a nuclear weapon State.

India was not a signatory to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), so technically it could do the nuclear test. But the reaction from the world was expectedly to be excoriating, hence it had to be extremely brave decision that one had to take and Vajpayee did. The five nuclear powers were too guarded to allow any other country to acquire nuclear weapons due not to lose their nuclear privilege and for the inherent dangers nuclear weapons carry.

However, Vajpayee knew it too well that the currency for a nation's power is the nuclear capability. He did not want India to lose out on its quest for being a world power, especially vis-à-vis China, a nuclear weapon State. Those critical of Vajpayee for not standing up to China were rebuffed when he went single-handed for the nuclear tests as an answer to China's bullying and belligerence.

Having done the test, shown to the world India's prowess, Vajpayee immediately went down the road of moderation and restraint. He announced an informal moratorium on further nuclear tests, and committed to no-first-use (NFU). Such self-restraint mollified many, upset by India's nuclear bravado, and looked at the incident with understanding and empathy.

The second issue is Vajpayee's outreach to Pakistan. Many expected a toughening of approach towards Pakistan by a BJP-led government. Vajpayee surprised all those by his extraordinary realism. He famously said, "You cannot change geography, meaning you cannot change or choose your neighbours." He tried to drive the point home by building peace with Pakistan. He jumped into a bus and headed for Pakistan to build bridges. As per the custom a dinner was hosted in his honour. It was reported that the atmosphere was a bit tense. He diffused the tension in a simplistic answer to a query by one journalist accompanying his delegation.

When the journalist asked what his impression of the dinner-talks was, Vajpayee said, in a lighter vein, "I do not know about the talks but you do not get the gajar ka halwa (carrot pudding) as good as in Islamabad. He then turned to General Musharraf and asked, "Is it not, General?" Such was the sense of detachment and the ability to generate good-will. His Pakistan visit, however, turned out to be a 'fiasco' as Pakistan attacked India to avenge India's occupation of the Siachen glacier in 1984 at Kargil-Dras sector of J&K.

That brings us to the infamous Kargil war of 1999, which India decisively won. But the way Vajpayee conducted the war was a remarkable display of aggression as well as restraint. He declared that not an inch of territory could be ceded at any cost but the LOC would not be crossed. Such restraint was admired by many international actors and earned India the support needed at that juncture.

Vajpayee's foreign policy was one of relaxed realism, a blend of pragmatism and idealism, a balance which is the hallmark of India's culture and civilization.--- INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, Jamia Milia Islamia)

TO THE EDITOR

MDA must set correct priorities

Editor,

If there is one quality that Conrad Sangma has which his predecessor Mukul Sangma lacked so visibly, it is the ability to listen when spoken to and to take notes when a suggestion is given. This is the trade mark of one who means business and who takes people seriously. This is the view shared by many citizens and officials who meet him on a daily basis. In terms of their ability to grasp the problems and opportunities of Meghalaya both the Sangmas are equally poised. But, whereas Mukul Sangma had a different leadership style of walking alone, Conrad Sangma tries to carry his colleagues along and gives them enough space to envision their own architecture for development in their respective departments but which are in synch with the larger goals. So far the only wrong move made by the MDA Government is the quest for luxury vehicles which Meghalaya cannot afford. In the MDA there is mutual respect among the current crop of ministers and Mr Prestone Tynsong by virtue of being an elder is given the respect he deserves.

Dr Donkupar Roy the UDP President and Speaker Legislative Assembly has observed that Conrad Sangma needs to be voted back to power so that he can retain his chief minister's post. This is very gracious of the former Chief Minister to give his younger colleague a chance at guiding the destiny of Meghalaya at this juncture in its history. Conrad Sangma is better able to understand the areas of job creation for the youth. He has already outlined ambitious plans for an IT park to create employment avenues for many of our youth who are now adding value to companies outside the state. We expect Conrad Sangma to put his management background to good use and manage the Government more professionally by setting pragmatic timelines for projects that are announced. Officers are notorious for not following through what ministers announce. Hence the young CM should regularly evaluate his officers from the youngest to the oldest. There is no time for complacency. In the past seven years of Congress rule there is not much that can be recounted as a success story although much is spoken about the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) and the many subsidiaries created under it.

The other day a regular columnist HH Mohrmen spoke of the distress sale of tomatoes and other vegetables in Jaintia Hills. We hope the CM is seized of the matter and that the Agriculture Minister takes stock of the plight of farmers in Jaintia Hills. I am sure the farmers elsewhere too suffer the same fate. The priority of this Government should be Agriculture and food processing. Of course Education, Health, Power, Roads, Water Supply too are important but if each minister is held accountable on a regular basis it should help set the trajectory straight.

Yours etc.,
Mawdondor Sohtun,
Shillong- 3

Welfare diplomacy

Editor,

This is in response to your editorial, "Imran in the saddle" (ST, Aug 21, 2018). If we use cricket terms, we can say that after the skipper of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif retired hurt, Pakistan has got a new captain in Imran Khan. We have fond memories of healthy and sporting competitions between the two all time great all-rounders namely India's Kapil Dev and Pakistan's Imran Khan. Can we now see such a healthy competition between the two neighbouring countries at the diplomatic level?

India and Pakistan need to wage an all-out war against poverty, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, child labour, illiteracy, tuberculosis, malaria, dengue and other diseases in their own countries and not against each other. Indeed, both India and Pakistan should start a healthy competition in human development.

India and Pakistan are the backbenchers in the class of human development. The former is at 131st position and the latter at 147th in the Human Development Index rank. It will be highly beneficial for the people of both the countries if a welfare diplomacy can be launched to come at least at par with Sri Lanka's 73rd rank in Human Development. To achieve it, India and Pakistan need a welfare diplomacy and not a warfare one between them.

Indeed, a new welfare diplomacy is the need of the hour. The bottom line of it will be to say the truth loud and clear that in the case of conflict, it is the weapon sellers who always win at the cost of the people of both the countries. Indeed, any war in general and Indo-Pak war in particular are nothing but staging of Aesop's story of a monkey winning the bread while two cats fight for the same.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Needless controversy over a hug

Editor,

The row created by the BJP over former Cricketer cum Congress leader Navjyot Singh Sidhu's hugging of Pakistan's Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa and sitting besides POK President on the swearing in ceremony of Imran Khan as Pakistan Prime Minister, is hyper critical and hinges on creating unnecessary hyper-nationalism to gain political brownie points. In fact, the former Indian Cricketer deserves to be congratulated and given a pat on the back by our PM, for going that extra mile in improving India-Pakistan relationship. Both India and Pakistan cannot afford to remain in a permanent state of hostility and politicians from both sides of the border need to go that extra mile to improve relationship with each other. Sidhu by hugging Pakistan's Army Chief had set a good precedence for both the country's leadership, that no matter how bitter the past is, it can still be forgotten and efforts made to create a better future..

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H.Laskar,
Guwahati.

"Even a mistake may turn out to be the one thing necessary to a worthwhile achievement."

--- Alice Koller

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.14 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 2018

Drama of hugs overplayed

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi was first accused of hugging too many heads of state even when they apparently did not fully reciprocate that hug. Most times the hugs looked contrived and appeared to be photo-ops occasions only. Then Congress President, Rahul Gandhi, recently broke all protocol by walking towards the Prime Minister in the middle of his speech in parliament and giving him a bear hug. Needless to say Modi was stumped and he reacted rather clumsily. Later Rahul Gandhi winked at his MP colleagues as if to communicate to them in sign language that he had scored a phenomenal political goal. Now it is the turn of Navjot Singh Sidhu, former cricketer and now a Congress MLA in Punjab and minister in the Amarinder Singh government. Sidhu was invited by the former Pakistani cricket team captain Imran Khan who was recently elected to the Pakistan Parliament, to his swearing-in ceremony. Imran Khan was sworn in as the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan on August 19.

Everything seemed fine until the Pakistan government strategically seated Sidhu next to the President of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), Masood Khan, during the swearing-in ceremony. That was seen by Indian media as a political affront considering India's discomfort with this disputed territory. Later Sidhu also hugged the Pakistan army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa and explained the reasons for doing so. He said it was an emotional response since General Bajwa said he was making efforts to open the corridor from Dera Baba Nanak to Kartarpur Sahab so pilgrims from India can pay obeisance to Guru Nanak. Things should have been allowed to cool down and the media could have got on with other more important issues but that was not to be. Sidhu who is remembered for his comedy show was pilloried for attending Imran Khan's swearing ceremony while missing out on Vajpayee's funeral. Former Indian cricket captains Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev besides actor Amir Khan were also invited for the swearing in but they politely declined. Imran Khan has now made a big deal out of Sidhu's attendance, calling it a symbol of goodwill and future peace initiatives. Whether that happens is immaterial but for now Sidhu is seen in many quarters as one who has transgressed the boundaries of political correctness, considering that Indian soldiers are being killed very often by Pakistani shelling from across the border. Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi is currently on a European tour ostensibly to solicit the support of non-resident Indians for the parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2019. While in Germany Rahul Gandhi was asked about the hug he gave to PM Modi and what his feelings were thereafter. So hugs seem to be the flavour of the season even while other more pressing matters are given short shrift.

Dissent is the lifeblood of Democracy

By Patricia Mukhim

Our plight as a Khasi community is that we claim to live in a democracy but our inherent responses and reactions to any situation date back to the days when we were an oligarchy; where women who speak up are called, "hens that crow," an aphorism cleverly constructed by the male to get women to shut up and mind the hearth and home because they are considered too dim-witted, to understand what constitutes, "ka synshar ka khadar" (governance). Traditional governance even today is the remit of men. At an unknown past it was reserved for men who had grown moustaches. The world and indeed this country has travelled a long way since then but our atavistic nature has not. Hence women who have publicly expressed their dissent on the Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill, 2018, are termed by no less than the CEM, KHADC as 'elitist' and as people who are "international" in their thought processes hence divorced from the ground realities in their cultural backyards. The few women who have spoken up are singled out and publicly defamed. Their pictures are culled out from social media and made public mockery of. The pictures of the children of a well known activist who happens to be married to a non-Khasi man by mutual consent, are circulated on social media with taunts that they don't look "Khasi." So now even the Khasi look must meet with certain facial features decided by the male gang of trolls. But these trolls have only drawn blood from HS Shylla himself who has, publicly slandered this writer and saying she has four non-tribal husbands which is a blatant lie. Can there be defamation worse than this? And this man calls himself the saviour of the Khasi jaidbynriew? Which jaidbynriew is he talking about? Before we arrive at the conclusion it is important to define what aspects of our DNA can be called Khasi.

Of all the assumptions about the etymology of the word Khasi, I came across this definition by E Brektis R Wanswett. He says the Khasi, as a race has a very unique and rather mysterious origin. The origin is shrouded in mystery due to lack of recorded history and all we know about their history is derived from legends and folklore." Oral narratives lend themselves to subjective constructions and modern writers and historians cull their information from such constructs. The origin of the Khasis too is uncertain. Hence it is easier to attribute that origin to divine ancestry and put an end to all doubts. Hence to try and define the facial feature of a "Khasi," is to me a desperate attempt by some who are hell bent on "protecting" this Khasi community from disappearing from the face of the earth. And that disappearance, according to this social and moral police will happen (a) because Khasi women are marrying non-Khasi, non-tribals and thereby 'diluting' the pristine Khasi bloodline (b) the scheming non-Khasi, non-tribal is marrying a Khasi women purely with the selfish motive of exploiting her tribal status. There is no research whatsoever about how many such non-tribal rakes have taken away our land and how many have added value to our social fabric and our intellectual gene pool. Women who have married non-Khasis, non-tribals are therefore now sought to be caricatured as the "enemies within." They are assumed to be "unpatriotic" (ba die tad ia ka jaidbynriew) and not Khasi enough to stand by whatever is being dictated to them and therefore transgressing the constructed norm of Khasi behaviour which is (a) women don't speak and least of all argue (b) dissent is unacceptable because whatever the "Rangbah" (male elders) say is indisputable.

What has happened over the years therefore is that Khasi society has existed in an echo-chamber where only a few who stomp into the political space have the right to speak loudly. Rhetoric is considered logic even when the speechifying is devoid of evidence and is built on a series of carefully assembled assumptions. But education has now made its mark. Those who have managed to get out of this echo chamber and have studied or are studying in leading universities outside the state, have, most of them, returned with their blinkers discarded in the dustbin of time. They are now taking on the elders with a no-nonsense posture and a remarkable ability to write unambiguously about what they feel strongly about. They dare to dissent; to take the path less travelled. They are not guarded in their comments and do not fear "what others will say" (which is what keeps most Khasi from expressing their views publicly), thereby making funeral homes the most favourite adda for cheap political gossip.

This is the generation that will not be intimidated by societal frameworks and archaic customs that have not adapted to the changing times. They will marry a person who is mentally and intellectually compatible and with whom they can spend their lives with. Or they will choose not to marry at all. It's their life after all. In fact, the contentious Khasi Lineage Bill, 2018 has brought out the best of Khasi contemporary thought but mostly from those who are against the Bill. Elders and the political class can ignore those thoughts at their peril. And how many dissenters can you defame and demonise? They will continue to come out and voice their thoughts, like it or not, because these young thinkers are not there to confirm anyone's biases. They think through, analyse and present their views coherently. It is a pleasure to read them and you also realise the huge intellectual gap between this generation and the one before them. We as elders too have to refocus our lenses to accommodate these outstanding pieces of intellectual brilliance.

Change indeed is the basic law of nature and changes wrought by the passage of time affects individuals and institutions in different ways. According to Darwin's Origin of Species, it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; the species that survives is the one that is best able to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself. In the context of Khasi society one might say that of all the tribes we have been the most exposed to outside influences yet we have managed to hold our own. Applying Darwin's theoretical concept to us as individuals, we can say that the civilization that is able to survive is the one that is able to adapt to the changing physical, social, political, moral, and spiritual environment in which it finds itself. Hence fear-mongering about the survival of the Khasi race might work to our detriment.

The problems with the arguments on culture and its conservation (not preservation) that surround the Khasi Lineage Bill, 2018 is that they see Khasi culture as a homogenous attribute thereby forgetting that there can be great variations even within the same general cultural milieu. This was very succinctly pointed out by Bhogtoram Mawroh in his article, "How Many Types Of Khasis Are There? (Raiot.in, August 22, 2018). This article is very instructive as it looks at the Khasi-Karbi interface in Ri Bhoi district and shows how some Karbis have assimilated into the Khasi culture and others haven't, while still others choose to straddle both identities. Sadly, as Amartya Sen says, cultural determinists often underestimate the extent of heterogeneity even in what is taken to be "one" distinct culture. Sen says it is disastrously deceptive to imagine culture to be stationary, explicit or implicit. Indeed, the temptation to use cultural determinism often takes the hopeless form of trying to fix the cultural anchor on a rapidly moving boat.

In closing I wish to clarify to those who have been fed the rhetoric that the Khasi Lineage Bill was recalled by the District Council that, that is not a fact. The Bill was returned by the District Council Affairs Department because it is not legally and constitutionally tenable. To use the word "recall" is to give the KHADC a face saving exit out of the controversy.

In a democracy there will always be different views on an issue and those who are trying to build a consensus around the Lineage Bill should understand that the majority is not always right. And having differences of opinion does not make us enemies of one another. Only insecure people indulge in personal mudslinging instead of focussing on the issue at hand. And without dissent there can be no democracy!

TO THE EDITOR

Clarification: In a letter appearing in this newspaper (ST Aug 21, 2018) written by one Lamkupar Rynjah, Ex-President, KSU Unit, Shillong-2, mention was made of 'Magnessa International' and an employee of the firm Purity Phawa, stating that the firm collects money from the public and claiming that the money will be doubled. It is confirmed that Magnessa Enterprise Private Ltd established in 2014 with its corporate office in Chennai and a branch at Shillong is a leading direct selling company for health and wellness products.

Rejoinder

Editor,

The letter by Lumkupar Rynjah (ST Aug 21, 2018) who claims to be Ex-President KSU unit is flawed and baseless and without any concrete evidence on the motives of the people mentioned, namely Nini Kurbah, Purity Phawa and BL Nonglait. This person has pointed to the personal lives of the above ladies to mislead the public instead of talking on the real issue that the indigenous Khasi is facing right now. This clearly is a diversionary tactic. Ironically Lamkupar Rynjah is seeking attention for himself. The question is what is he trying to convey to the people? Our answer is that he is purely narcissistic and suffers from attention deprivation. Such kind of persons need psychological, mental health and medication to treat this deprivation or disorder. All we care is that these three women came from their comfort zones of their homes to form "STIEH."They feel a need to voice out their concerns for the other Khasi - Jaintia women and men on the dangerous scenario of unchecked mix-marriages. As of now, if the trend carries on the Khasi - Jaintia tribes will be endangered. To be more precise they will only be known in mute photo albums and history books.

It is clearly as daylight that these women are not affiliated to any political organization or have any intentions whatsoever to do so in the future. Right from the first meeting that they had convened they have made it clear that they have no affiliation with any political party/parties. Also, their motive to form 'STIEH" is not for personal gain but for protection and preservation of the Khasi - Jaintia tribes. By supporting the Social Custom and Lineage, Second Amendment Bill. 2018, the group feels it has done justice to their agenda. If the Bill is not passed at the earliest, the group will fight tooth and nail till the Bill is finally passed in the KHADC. Such deliberations and false claims by individuals to divert the attention of the group will only strengthen its cause. Personal mud-slinging will only reap support from the Khasi - Jaintia people far and wide about the importance of the cause.

All we can say to this individual - Lamkupar Rynjah is to come forward (if he is real) and speak with the group about his intention instead of diverting attention from such a vital issues at this critical moment and beating around the bush and making false allegations towards the leader of the group "STIEH".

Yours etc.,
Rani Kurbah,
(General Secretary)
Purity Phawa
(Organizing Secretary)
B.L. Nonglait
(Publicity Secretary)

Decriminalize Politics

Editor,

The Supreme Court of India on August 10 last donned the garb of "conscience-keeper" to nudge Parliament to amend the law on keeping criminals out of politics, while hearing petitions seeking an election bar on people facing serious criminal charges and not just those convicted. The five-judge Constitution Bench headed by the Chief Justice Dipak Mishra observed that Parliament has a constitutional obligation to amend Article 102 of the Constitution relating to disqualification of MPs. The Bench said it is a cry of the citizenry and a collective need of the society as a whole. It is a national thinking today and can no longer be ignored by the legislature to inject purity into elections.Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act now bars only those convicted of a criminal offence from contesting elections - during the jail term and for a further six years.

The petitioners - the Public Interest Foundation, Bharatiya Matdata Sangathan and advocate Ashwini Upadhyay have furnished data claiming 34 per cent of the present MPs face serious criminal charges. They have asked the bench, which includes Justices R. F. Nariman, A. M. Khanwilkar, D. Y. Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra, to direct the poll panel to bar from polls anyone against whom a serious criminal charge, entailing a punishment of at least five years, has been framed. Initially Attorney-general K K Venugopal had argued that such legislation lay within Parliament's domain alone and that everyone was innocent until convicted and accepting the petitions may trigger false cases against politicians. He, however, agreed that it was a serious matter if 34 per cent of MPs faced criminal cases and conceded that a stage has come for Parliament to review the situation.

Senior counsel Dinesh Dwivedi, appearing for the Public Interest Foundation said that the Select Committee of Parliament has rejected this idea solely on the ground of criminal jurisprudence of 'innocent until proven guilty'. Today's politicians, irrespective of their affiliations to party, are all having nexus with goons & criminals for intimidating and coercing voters to exercise their franchise in favour of their parties alone or not allowing them to cast vote at all by threatening with dire consequences. Present-day politicians are in fact using money & muscle power openly with armed goons during elections. Being multimillionaires they are practically purchasing mandate of electorate or forcibly snatching their fundamental right of voting. MPs, serving jail terms, and hard-core criminals like Syed Sahabuddin of Siwan, Bihar deserve to be banned for life for contesting elections and political parties like RJD disbanded.

In view of the long silence of the Selection Committee of Parliament on the issue, Senior advocate Krishnan Venugopal, appearing for Ashini Upadhyay , expressed doubt that the legislatures are unlikely to bar candidates facing criminal cases since political parties needed such people.Under the circumstances if democracy is to function and survive at all in the largest democratic country of the world, the Supreme Court of India, as conscience-keeper, can issue a direction to Parliament or Poll panel to cure the cancerous malady.Or else would the NDA Government should bell the cat by legislating a stringent Act and making necessary amendments to Article 102 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

Yours etc.,
Samares
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.

Why 'Make in India' suddenly sounds jarring to Modi ears

Poor job creation record nails govt propaganda

By Subrata Majumder

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech surreptitiously missed the Make in India story, while he was exuberant about all other major schemes. Make in India was supposed to be his flagship scheme, as it was projected as the main driver of job creation in the country.

Observers are at a loss over the real reason for omitting the Make in India report card, when the Lok Sabha elections are nearing. According to a recent opinion poll survey, job creation topped the list for Modi's failures. Analysts wonder why Modi is silent on Make in India while the Economic Survey and other government documents claimed success on that front.

A parallel trend co-exists between GDP growth and employment generation. High GDP growth means more job opportunities. In contrast, India witnessed a contraction in labour market despite GDP achieving high growth during the four years of Modi rule. While GDP registered growth of an average 7 per cent per year during 2014-15 to 2017-18, the manufacturing industry did not show a corresponding growth, which should have led to job creation, analysts argued. From July 2014 to December 2016, only 6.4 lakh jobs were created, as against 12.8 lakh jobs created from 2011 to 2013 during UPA period.

The employment structure and manufacturing systems in the country suffer from a fallacy. In India, the informal sector is the big labour absorbent. According to NITI Aayog, 83 percent of workers in India are self-employed, casual or contact workers. They are all in the informal sector. With the advancement of technology and modern industries, entrepreneurs in organized sectors have chosen to stay away from labour-intensive industries and opted for highly capital or skilled-labour intensive industries. A number of labour intensive industries shifted to technology oriented and more mechanized factories, resulting in shrinkage of employment.

Till four years ago, there were only a few mobile phone manufacturers in the country. Today, 100 million mobile phones are manufactured, meeting more than half of the domestic demand.

Various reasons have been cited for the failure of Make in India, one of the most important being a lag in domestic investment. The major factor inhibiting domestic investment was the uncertainty over Modi's business friendly outlook after demonetization and GST. The sudden announcement of demonetization and the GST, warranting several procedural compliances, created major hassles for investment in the informal sectors. Besides, putting reforms like land acquisition and labour laws on the backburner created a backlash against domestic investments.

Even though foreign investment surged, it failed to impact job creation. Three years were too short a period for investment to reflect in terms of job creation. More than 85 percent of foreign direct investment was in the green field areas. Generally, a green field project in manufacturing requires 2-3 three years gestation period to start the operation. Given these, yields of job creation from FDI projects will be visible only after 2018.

It was too early to gauge the impact of start-ups on job creation. The start-up policy, embedding various incentives, was launched in November 2016. Bulk of the start-ups are in the service sector, such as in E-commerce. Few are in manufacturing sector, resulting in low levels of job creation.

Slump in exports is another area which led to failures on the job creation front. Export-linked job is a major chunk of job opportunities in the informal sectors. About 30 percent of India's exports are from labour-intensive industries. Export growth dipped into volatility due to the global slump, and caused depressed mood in the industry for job creation. According to an empirical study by the Export Import Bank of India, India's export-linked jobs increased by over 9 percent from 1999-2000 to 14.5 percent in 2012-13. With exports slipping into downtrend consecutively for two years during the Modi regime, export-supported jobs witnessed bad days.

There has been transformational change in the manufacturing practices, which showed sectoral growth and labour intensive industries were not the panacea for Make in India success. Sectoral growth, such as textile, leather, agro based industries, cannot act as springboards to let India become the global manufacturing hub, lest it becomes party to GVC (Global Value Chain) value added manufacturing network.

Given the low cost production as the base for the benefits under GVC manufacturing network across the borders, firms in developed countries have established transnational manufacturing network, combining their high tech know how with lower wage labour in developing countries. Eventually, production has become increasingly fragmented across the borders through the growing prevalence of GVC for production of components and parts in low wage countries. South East and East Asia became the major stakeholders in this new pattern of production.

India trailed behind in this race, the main reasons being inadequate supply of skilled labour, lacklustre export infrastructure, limitation of scale and difficulty in accessing cheap credit. These economic ills shadowed India's potential as manufacturing exporter and became detrimental for it to enter the GVC network for manufacturing.

Nonetheless, rise in wages in China, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia – the main partners for GVC -- unleashes opportunities for India to be party to GVC value added mode, owing to its low cost manufacturing facilities. However, only low wages are not enough. Technology upgradation, skilled manpower and better export infrastructure are essential for India to become party to GVC manufacturing network across borders and make the Make in India a big success. (IPA Service)

"Desire is the starting point of all achievement, not a hope, not a wish, but a keen pulsating desire which transcends everything."

--- John Wooden

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.15 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, AUGUST 25, 2018

The Naga accord

WHEN the assembly elections were held in Nagaland this year, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (IM) demanded that the Naga accord should be finalised before the polls were held. Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured it that it would be concluded soon after the polls. But no decision has been arrived at as yet. Over the years, negotiations have been held and progress has been made in a phased manner. A framework agreement was signed in 2015. The agreement accepted the special status of the Nagas. There was an understanding on a settlement within the Indian Federation, with due regard to the uniqueness of Naga history. The Centre's interlocutor, R N Ravi said that some special arrangement would be made for the Nagas. There was already a special arrangement under Article 371 A of the Constitution which made that clear but 371 A does not extend to other areas inhabited by Nagas such as Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The Nagas initially insisted on the unification of Naga inhabited areas. But in 2015, they agreed that the current boundaries of the North Eastern states would not be touched. That meant that the grievances of Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh were redressed. The NSCN (Khaplang) which violated the ceasefire in 2015 was not part of the peace process.

The NSCN (IM) has also dropped its demand for sovereignty. But it threatened to pull out of the framework agreement if the government included smaller groups in the peace process. After several rounds of talks, it agreed to the inclusion of the smaller groups except NSCN (Khaplang), in the process. Now the sticking points are demands for a separate flag and passport and the question of armed Naga battalions. It seems unlikely that these issues will be resolved before the Lok Sabha elections. Perhaps there are contentious issues that relate to the special status that Nagas demand within the state of Manipur which is the sticking point. Recently, Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh took a stand that autonomy of governance along the line of the Sixth Schedule for Naga areas within Manipur would not be acceptable. This has created hurdles for the talks to progress. It is a fact that the hill districts of Manipur inhabited by the Nagas are far from developed. No institution of any standing exists in those areas. Hence a special economic push is needed to bring people of the hills at par with those in the valley. The belligerence of the Manipur CM is therefore nothing but an obstructionist ploy.

LOOKING BACK

May 29, 1989

ABSU rejects Assam govt's invitation for fresh talks

The All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo People's Action Committee `rejected' the Assam Government's invitation for talks on June 15 on the Bodo issue saying they have "no confidence" in the government. ABSU general secretary Mr Rabi Ram Brahma said here that the two organization demand immediate intervention by the Centre to find a political solution to the Bodo problem. They were in favour of negotiated settlement. For this purpose, talks should be held between representatives of ABSU and BPAC and the Central Government in Delhi, Mr Brahma said.

The situation had been "aggravated" in areas inhabitated by the tribal community due to the repressive measures" let loose by the state government, he alleged. Hence, no purpose would be served by talks with the state government. The ABSU and BPAC in a statement here alleged that more than 300 "innocent Bodo people" had been killed "under a planned massacre scheme" by the police at the instance of the state government. Another three thousand people belonging to the community had been taken into custody and denied proper food and lodging, the statement added.

House of a number of people of the community in Kokrajhar, Darang and Barpeta districts had been "looted". There should be an inquiry into the incidents by the Centre, they demanded. In these circumstances, the ABSU and the BPAC had been "compelled to reject the invitation for talks" and urged the Centre to invite their leaders to Delhi for an immediate political settlement of the Bodoland issue, they said. The Vice President of All Bodo Student's Union Mr Pradeep Kumar Daimary alleged at Shillong that police killed more than 25 people in "fake encounters" during the ABSU sponsored 300-hour Assam bandh, adds our reporter.

How Many Types of Khasis Are There

BY Bhogtoram Mawroh

The KHAD (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018 was destined and designed to fail and it was not a surprise to see that it did when it was rejected by the Governor and sent back. It was rife with inconsistencies which now the leaders of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council claim that it will look to correct. It is a little too late for that now.

There are two arguments against the bill which were put forward by those that oppose the bill: it was anti-woman and undemocratic because it was passed without taking important stakeholders like the various clans that make up the Khasi community into consideration. There was a tentative acceptance from some of those who oppose the bill that certain problems like non-tribal men marrying Khasi woman for material benefits may exist. I believe that in some cases that might be true, more in exception than in rule. But there are certain things that have to be understood when such an argument is made. There is the concept of 'gold diggers' – people who marry other people for wealth rather than affection. So the question becomes can Khasi men also not be 'gold diggers'? I for sure know some Khasi men who can be categorised as such. This is therefore not a unique of a situation.

So is the transfer of land and wealth to non-local through matrimony a problem? This again is not that simple. Land Transfer Act does not allow non-tribals, in fact, other tribals other than indigenous to Meghalaya from buying property in the State. So when confronted with the legal impossibility of such a transfer, the supporters of the Amendment argue about indirect control, i.e., Benami. But then is there not a law for that as well? If that is the case why bring a new law when there are already existing ones that need to be properly implemented, especially the second.

In light of these facts, The KHAD (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment) Bill, 2018 was nothing but a stunt for next year's MDC/MP election. There is though another problem with the Bill. It is anti-jaidbynriew (to borrow the term from the local Right) and will weaken the community at a time when the danger from outside forces (political dispensation, economic system, ecological uncertainty) is going to become more severe.

The thrust of the Bill was to ensure that there is purity of race (a discarded concept) by forbidding marriages outside the community. But by leaving out Khasi men marrying non-Khasi women the cat got out of the bag. Racial purity (supposed) is going to be disturbed if any foreign element is brought in. It doesn't matter whether it's from the men's side or the women's. The answer to this dilemma was given by one of the panellists in one of the TV debate held on the issue. "The problem doesn't arise because the seed comes from the man" argued by one who was in support of the bill. Not surprisingly it was a man who said it. I was wondering if that was true why doesn't he trying mixing his seed with the seed of another male panellist sitting beside him and see if it germinates. If it does I will agree to whatever arguments are made in favour of the Bill. On a serious note though, this idea of racial purity is especially not applicable to the Khasis because the sub-groups within them have acknowledged the history of admixture. One of such groups is the Bhoi.

"A Bhoi is someone who takes the mother's surname while a Karbi is someone who takes the father's surname" – an elderly Karbi lady from one of the villages in Ri Bhoi tells me. This particular Karbi lady married a Khasi man and her children now have a Khasi surname. Though she still has a Karbi surname she hardly communicates in Karbi anymore. With the Karbi people from other villages also she converses in Bhoi (a dialect different than the Sohra dialect which the official dialect of the Khasi community) and she is not the only one. What is important to notice is that it is not language but lineage which according to her distinguishes a Bhoi from a Karbi. This could be because of the stark difference between the Karbi and Khasi based on lineage rules. However, in case both groups had followed the same system this distinction will not work. This situation is further complicated because some 'Khasi' customs are not followed by the Bhoi, like the tang-jait.

In the Bhoi region, there is a type of matrimonial alliance which is known as shim-bhoi. In case a family has only male children, in order to keep the property within the same clan brides are sought from the Karbi clans (who follow the patrilineal system) rather than the matrilineal Bhoi clans. The children get the father's surname and if they in turn have female children of their own the matrilineal system is adopted. This is different from the upland Khynriem (a Khasi sub group like the Bhoi) custom of tang-jait where the children of a union between a Khasi man and a non-Khasi woman will get a new Khasi surname. This comparison illustrates the comparatively greater flexibility in the Bhoi region where the presence of a patrilineal system is used as a medium through which a particular clan continues to maintain control over the ancestral property. What is also noticeable is also how the term Bhoi is used to designate the members of Karbi population who follow a patrilineal system rather than the matrilineal system of the Khasis. The headman of the Karbi lady's village stated that "the Bhoi actually are the Karbis who actually were called Bhoi by the other Khasi sub-tribes". This is something which has been alluded to by the British when they first arrived in this region: "The people are known as Bhois in these hills, who are many of them really Mikirs (another name for Karbi), live in the low hills to the north and north-east of the district (United Khasi and Jaintia Hills), the term "Bhoi" being a territorial name rather than tribal" (PR Gurdon, 1914).

The equivalence of surname is another phenomenon which is present in the Bhoi region (Ramirez, 2014). Members from the different ethnic communities which are residing in the area are found to be sharing membership in more than one ethnic group. A surname among the Bhoi-Khasi is found to have an equivalent among the Karbi and the Tiwa another important ethnic group (see table). This performs two functions, viz., new members into a group can only be admitted into the clans that already have established inter-ethnic affiliations; and consequently, marriages also have the follow the same route, i.e., following the rules of endogamy marriages cannot take place within the equivalent clan across the ethnic categories. According to the Census records Karbis formed around 15% of the population in Ri Bhoi, but according to Karbi activists and commentators the number is much higher, more than 30% (Teron et al, 2008). The discrepancy could be due to the fact that the latter might have included all the surnames that have Karbi equivalence or its corruption as being part of the Karbi population, for example, Killing (Karbi) becoming Klein (Bhoi-Khasi). Done in this way the Karbi numbers will inevitably increase. However, such an approach is fraught with problems.

The stability of such a system of inter-ethnic commonality points to the fact that such a process has been a two-way traffic. The method of identifying the population of a group (Karbi) by also counting its surname equivalent in another group (Khasi) is based on the assumption of a flow towards only one direction, i.e. of the latter. However, as observed in a case where an entire village was converted from Garo to Karbi through a ceremony it is clear that this is not the case (Ramirez, 2014). The British administrations have also recorded cases of non-Karbis being assimilated in such a manner during 17th Century (Teron et al, 2008). Therefore the assumption of unilateral flow is not tenable. In case of mixed marriages, the problem becomes more complicated. For example, a child borne out of a marriage between a Bhoi (matrilineal) and a Karbi (patrilineal) can be claimed by both the ethnic groups. Therefore, the real numbers will vary depending on who is counting them. In an environment where demand for ethnic homelands is quite endemic amongst the various groups in the region, inflating numbers can be a very useful strategy. This allows a group to lay claim on additional territories as well. Of course this does not go uncontested.

From the Karbi side the argument can be made that in a Khasi dominated landscape the trend is primarily assimilation towards the latter rather than the former. The Bhoi region had been under the influence of Jaintia (Pnar – another Khasi sub-group) kingdom and the Nongkrem (Khynriem) Syiemship in the past and is presently a district on the Khasi-dominated part of Meghalaya. For socio-political reasons it would make more sense for the Karbis to assimilate within the Khasi rather than the other way around. However, this is not assimilation where the minority community's identity gets completely lost within the dominant community. Here vestiges of the previous identity are still intact and in fact it is these connections that guide the process. This allows the incoming group to still maintain connection with the group they left. It is these connections that allow some of them to try and regain the previous identity. There are cases of people who having been born with a Khasi surname chose to leave it for a Kabri surname. The dominance of a community cannot be looked only from the macro scale of a district or a state but at the micro level of village as well. Also, individual decisions based on factors other than politics has to be considered.

Bhoi can be understood as both 'border' as well as 'people of the border' (Ramirez, 20147) and like all border areas shows a great deal of diversity in terms of ethnic and linguistic composition. This identity like Gurdon (1914) remarked could be more of a geographic nature than an ethnic category. The line of argument can be advanced regarding the identity of the different sub-tribes among the Khasis as well. The seven sub-tribes of the Khasis can be identified with specific geographic locations (see figure 1) which could be the initial criterion for differentiation. This later got ossified into a restrictive ethnic category where lineages became the defining criterion rather than location. However, many on the ground still cling to the original design. When asked about their ethnicity people (from different ethnic backgrounds) in the village identified themselves firstly as Bhoi and then on being further prodded as Bhoi-Khasi or Karbi. Coming to myself, my grandfather was a Pnar, my father is a Karbi and my mother is a War (another Khasi sub-group).

The Khasi community can be divided into seven sub-groups, viz., War, Jaintia/Pnar, Lyngngam, Maram, Diko, Khyriem and Bhoi. These groups can be identified with certain geographical locations (see figure). Collectively they are called as Khasi. However, this nomenclature is not accepted by others, especially the Jaintia who prefer to refer themselves as Jaintia or Pnar. Another term which has been attempted to identify the community is Hynniewtrep after the origin myth. So if the Bill is accepted it would mean you have to remove the Bhoi and the Lyngngam (who have been acknowledged as being a mixture of Khasi and Garo) out of this scheme for the simple reason that they are not pure. Not just a single parent, both the parent were most probably non-Khasi. So there is no Hynniewtrep anymore and we have to find a new word to define the community which is acceptable to the remaining groups.

The more correct way of looking at the Khasi is that they are not a race but a people who follow different customs and traditions but have chosen to identify as Khasi based on similarities like the lineage system, language and other cultural markers. As more work is done on other groups especially the War (to which I belong) more diversities will be unearthed. The story of the Khasi is the story of different groups coming in the past and assimilating making the community making it richer in diversity and history. This does not mean there is nothing called the Khasi. When I cross into Ri Bhoi from Assam I know I am home among my people. When the time comes I will stand shoulder to shoulder with my brethrens to make sure that our homeland does not become another Tripura or Sikkim-Darjeeling. This land has been the abode of the Khasi for thousands of years and will continue to remain so in the future as well. But at the same time, the history of my community saves me from falling into the trap of prejudiced hate and unjustified animosity. This for me is the beauty of being a Khasi which no Bill will ever take it away.

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(By arrangement with Raiot.in and the author)

TO THE EDITOR

Love not law the cornerstone of family

Editor,

I'm not sure if Michael Syiem read the article I wrote nearly two weeks ago. My intention was not to demoralize him and throw mud at him but rather to give constructive criticisms to his noble intentions. I'm on the same page with him on many burning issues crippling a microscopic community like ours but I differ with him on the means and methods to attain those goals. I don't have anything against the khun khatduh (youngest daughter); in fact I can't help falling in love with them. Almost all the girls I've fallen in love in the past have been khun khatduhs and I might even end up marrying one; who knows what the future holds. But it is completely outrageous in this day and age if some parents who possess wealth stick to the status quo and give all the wealth to one person – the youngest daughter! Such parents should hang their heads in shame and take a hard look at themselves in the mirror! But it is equally outrageous if a law on equitable distribution of income is implemented. Suspicious minds will rule our hearts and disgruntlement will tear the family structure to shreds and the family as the basic building block of society will crumble and our society will be completely shattered.

And this takes me back almost 2000 years ago to a parable about the prodigal son that Jesus Christ told to demonstrate the love that the father has for his children. When Jesus told this story, he would have definitely taken into account the prevailing social norms and customs in the promised land at that time. The father as the head of the family has the final word on a family's decision making. It was a double whammy for the elder son when firstly the father yielded to the unreasonable demand of the younger son and gave him his share of the inheritance and secondly when he returned home empty handed without a single penny in his pocket, the father accepted him again to the family fold with open arms. This initially incensed the elder brother who felt that he was unfairly treated but he later saw reason and accepted the father's decision to hand his younger brother a second chance at redemption. Who knows what would have happened had a law on inheritance existed back then! The elder son might have taken offence at the decision of the father and he might have challenged his decision in a court of law since accepting the younger son to the family again after he squandered his share of inheritance would have meant that he would partake of the fruits of his labour and receive his share of inheritance again and the parable of the prodigal son will not hold water in such a in such a scenario.

Family decision making is all about mutual understanding and love should be the cornerstone stone of the family. As far as Khasi society is concerned, there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to the law of inheritance. I remember a wealthy college friend from Mairang telling me that his mother had already allocated a share of the family wealth to him. It was a pleasant surprise to hear of the changing mindsets even in rural areas. Khasi society is changing gradually and the walls of resistance to change are slowly tumbling down. Let the winds of change blowing and touching our hearts be the agent of change rather than letting a forceful storm rip our society.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Delay in issuing Domicile Certificate

Editor,

I was selected to join the Army in the just concluded Recruitment Rally held in Tura and had applied for Domicile Certificate as it is required by the Army for joining the said job. It is now more than three months from the date of application (via online mode as I was told it would take just two weeks) in the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Nongpoh but I am yet to get the Certificate. When I enquired from the staff about it, their answers were ambiguous and they made me come to the office repeatedly. I have to submit all my documents before September 11, 2018 but I am yet to get my Domicile Certificate. I request the Deputy Commissioner to please issue the said Certificate at the earliest. Besides, I am not the only one as there are many youths from Ri Bhoi who are suffering the same plight as I am. This concerns our future so please don't play with it. I also request the pressure groups, NGOs and intellectuals who fight and write about saving the Jaitbynriew to take up such issues too.

Yours etc.,
Euegene Wilfred
Syngkli,
Umsning Ribhoi District

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

All's not well in Barpeta's fireworks industry

Legacy moves on for 133 years despite govt 'apathy', high input costs

By Saurav Bora

They have braved the odds to protect a "sparkling" legacy spanning over 13 decades.

But lack of government support, as claimed by the fireworks artisans here, has been harming them commercially for years now, especially when "inferior quality" crackers from Sivakasi (in Tamil Nadu) and a chunk of eye-catching imported items are literally invading markets in the North East.

"We have not been able to make much headway economically primarily because of the lack of access to subsidised raw material, which increases our cost of production and subsequently reflects on the selling price," Ramani Mohan Pathak, co-proprietor of Manoranjan Fireworks, one of the five major firms engaged in the trade in Barpeta town, told The Shillong Times.

"The point here is that the quality which characterises Barpeta's fireworks cannot be compromised despite high input costs for which we have to sell our products at relatively higher prices. Thus, cheaper, comparatively inferior quality crackers from Sivakasi have overtaken us in the Diwali market," Pathak said.

The fireworks industry in the lower Assam district operates under the Barpeta Atasbaji Silpa Somobai Samiti. At present, about 60 workers are engaged in the five units.

The fireworks here are handmade unlike the better packaged variety from Sivakasi.

Over the years, umpteen pleas before the state government for making raw materials such as sulphur, potassium nitrate, cast iron particles and charcoal available at subsidised rates have fallen on deaf ears.

"The major raw materials are procured from Kolkata for which we are paying three times more to bring them here. This eats into our profit margins. It hurts us because we are yet to be better off economically," Pathak rued, as he dexterously demonstrated the mixture prepared manually inside a flowerpot in the backyard of his Brindabanhati residence.





(From left) The fireworks village in Barpeta and Ramani Mohan Pathak prepares a flower pot at his residence in Barpeta town

Worse still, over the past five years or so, a section of manufacturers in neighbouring Nalbari district have allegedly been imitating the trade, manufacturing inferior products and selling them as "Barpeta firecrackers".

"This is a real worry as we value our products and the fact that we have not deviated from tradition and principle for profits is testimony to our unflinching conviction to preserve our legacy. But a section of unscrupulous traders are compromising on the raw material mixture, using sand to save on input costs, which affects quality and maligns our image," Gunajit Pathak, another member of the firm, said.

The prices of the products range from Rs 25 to Rs 2000 in the retail market.

It may be mentioned that the fireworks industry here was given a logo designed by the National Institute of Design a few years back but he manufacturers have not been able to capitalize on it.

"We have used the logo only on the receipts to buyers but not been able to use it on the products as a result of which out items are being imitated. We have requested authorities to provide suitable packaging material so that the logo can be printed on the products," Gunajit said.

The Assam Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation under the state commerce and industry department had implemented a Rs 7crore project – Fireworks Village – at Ganak Kuchi here a few years back but nothing has changed since.

As on date, a locked, unused modern complex with a handful of cattle grazing in the portions left for grass to grow is what one gets to see.

"Spaces for five units were allotted at the Fireworks Village but with no active power and water supply connections we have preferred not to go there. Worse still, a water pump has been stolen. Besides, there is a whopping power bill pending as one of the firms had occupied the space for a brief period," said Gunajit, as he shared a letter from AIIDC in March last year asking the firms to complete the formalities for the lease deed within 20 days.

"There is a need for grooming the artisans with packaging skills so that the products appear attractive," he added.

Now with Diwali just about two months away, the artisans will take fresh guard by the end of August so that the products ready for retailers on time.

"Diwali is our peak season but we also prepare items for the Raas festival and for occasions such as weddings," Gunajit said.

However, barring Assam and some pockets in Northeast, the fireworks have not been able to penetrate markets outside the region.

Barpeta Atasbaji Silpa Somobai Samiti president, Gopjit Pathak lamented that despite being a local industry and a tradition nurtured over a century now, the government has not paid attention to their needs.

"It is a shame that outsiders have taken away a major chunk of the market. Our products, which comprise only a minuscule portion of the Northeast market, are of superior quality and do not cause pollution as the casing material primarily comprises natural ingredients," Gopjit told this correspondent at his Bilartari Hati residence here.

Why annoy host societies with burqa?



By Saeed Naqvi

In normal times Britain's former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's observation that burqa-clad women resemble walking "letter boxes" and "bank robbers" would evoke laughter. But these are not normal times.

Just when liberals were beginning to pelt stones at him, a startling turn to the debate was given by Taj Hargay, Imam of Oxford. "The burqa is a Wahabi fifth column... We will wake up in the Islamic Republic of Britain."

Johnson's observation is mischievous, and has a political purpose, the Imam's an exaggeration. The observations are troubling for an Indian Muslim.

I would avoid being judgemental on a community which has been under immense pressure because of rampaging Islamophobia since the 1990s. And yet, I cannot help asking: Is the burqa a response to nasty Islamophobia or a means of aggravating it?

Aggravation of the problem is surely not our purpose. Then whose purpose is served by Muslim women floating around Oxford Circus in gear which distances them, in geometrical progression, from the host population? The clerics, eager to consolidate their congregations? Wouldn't it be wonderful if these congregations had in their midst scholars, doctors, writers, scientists, entrepreneurs, rather than pliant women fitting Boris Johnson's description.

I am troubled for another reason. After extensive travel around the world, I am inclined to cast my vote in recent years for Britain as a society where human rights, rule of law, race relations are most secure. That is why I am uneasy at the two observations.

Let me turn to India to bring out my point, by comparison, in bolder relief.

The depths to which Hindu-Muslim relations have sunk in India is attributed by pundits to the brazenly communal politics of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014. If an ancient civilisation, embracing 1.25 billion people, can be so totally transformed in merely four years, Modi and his cohorts deserve to be celebrated as miracle men.

No, the present government has clearly accelerated the communal agenda but the ground for it was diligently laid over 71 years of independence. The ruling party for most of these decades was the Congress.

Social disharmony was built into the manner in which India's Partition was affected. The Congress was firmly opposed to the two-nation theory enunciated by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan — that Hindus and Muslims constituted two separate nations. But the Congress accepted Lord Mountbatten's June 3, 1947, plan for Partition in double-quick time.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, former President of the Congress, and others warned Pandit Nehru that Partition would mean "unadulterated Hindu Raj".

By that logic, once the Congress Working Committee had accepted a Muslim state, with a small Hindu minority, named Pakistan, it logically followed that the rest of India would be Hindustan or a Hindu state with a substantial Muslim minority. In other words, on August 15, 1947, India glided seamlessly from British Raj to Hindu Raj but Nehru chose not to use the term "Hindu" for a variety of reasons.

A "Hindu" state was an affront to his self-image. Self-image was important to Nehru. In his evolution, there was a phase when he was angry with his father for having hired an English governess for his sister, Vijaylakshmi Pandit.

"Bhai (brother) was cross," Mrs Pandit told me, "because British aristocracy those days preferred French governesses."

The basic reason why Nehru avoided the term "Hindu" to describe the new found state was Kashmir. How could a Hindu state claim the Muslim majority province of Kashmir on the principle of contiguity?

Look at it from the hardcore Hindu perspective. After a thousand years of Muslim rule, 200 of British, the Muslim state of Pakistan does come into being. But, alas, no Hindu state. The sophistry of why it is so is lost on the millions. This is where the Hindu communalist pitches his tent.

> I have argued in my book *Being The Other: The Muslim in India* that calling a spade a spade at the very outset would have minimised the social disharmony that has plagued us for 71 years. From day one we should have declared ourselves a Hindu state

It turns out that, over the decades, a compulsive hatred for Pakistan has emerged an acid test for nationalism. Into this bubbling cauldron has been pushed a boulder — the post-9/11 war against terror. The Islamophobia this has generated globally has been grist to the Hindu communalist's mill too.

I have argued in my book *Being The Other: The Muslim in India* that calling a spade a spade at the very outset would have minimised the social disharmony that has plagued us for 71 years. From day one we should have declared ourselves a Hindu state. This would have obviated the need for an unsettling, double-distilled Hindu Rashtra or Hindu Nation. The Hindu in this "raj" would have been at the steering wheel but the minorities would have struck a stronger bargain for education, seats in Parliament, jobs in the cabinet, Civil Service, Police, Armed Forces and so on.

Detractors raise a howl of protest. How can a theoretic state be secular?

In the recent elections in Pakistan, three Hindus — Mahesh Malani, Hari Ram Kishwari Lal and Giyan Chand Essrani — won from general seats in Sind, one for the National Assembly and two for the Provincial Assembly.

The fact that Britain is a Protestant monarchy did not come in the way of Sadiq Khan serving as London's high profile Mayor. Last year, Donald Trump banned travel to the US from several Muslim countries. He was therefore not accorded a "state" visit to Britain because in that event protocol would have involved the Mayor of London. Saving Sadiq Khan this embarrassment was important enough for the organisers to deny Trump a state banquet with the Queen.

The Home Secretary Sajid Javid may not be a practicing Muslim but he is there high in public profile to make a bid for the top job. Two years ago when I watched a Test match there were four Muslims in the English cricket team. I have met doctors, teachers, civil servants, entrepreneurs from the subcontinent, both Hindus and Muslims, thriving. The Anglican Church never came in their way. In India's circumstances in 1947, a Hindu India may have been better, than the one cloaked in a hollow and bogus secularism where the police watch on as one Muslim (or Dalit) after another is lynched, some to the accompaniment of expert photography. *(IANS)*

(A senior commentator on political and diplomatic affairs, Saeed Naqvi can be reached on saeednaqvi@hotmail.com. The views expressed are personal.)

Be an expert in nutrition

By Ranjan K Baruah

Diet and nutrition are important as well as a balanced diet is must for us. In recent years due to fast changes there has been a change in food habit among people. It is high time that we need to know what we are eating. One of the career options related to this is Nutrition and Dietetics.

Nutrition is the science that interprets the interaction of nutrients and other substances in food in relation to maintenance, growth, reproduction, health and disease of an organism. It includes food intake, absorption, assimilation, biosynthesis, catabolism and excretion.

The diet of an organism is what it eats, which is largely determined by the availability and palatability of foods. For humans, a healthy diet includes preparation of food and storage methods that preserve nutrients from oxidation, heat or leaching, and that reduces risk of food-borne illnesses.

A dietician is an expert on human nutrition and the regulation of diet. A dietician alters patient's nutrition-based upon their medical condition and individual needs. Dieticians are regulated healthcare professionals licensed to assess, diagnose and treat nutritional problems.

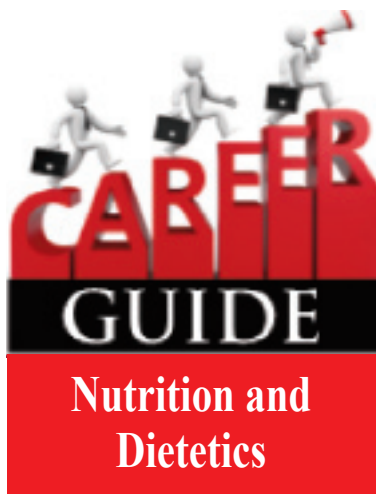
A registered dietician or registered dietician nutritionist is a dietician who meets all of a set of special academic and professional requirements, including the completion of a bachelor's degree with an accredited nutrition curriculum, an internship at an approved health-care facility, food service organisation, or community agency and satisfactory performance on a registration exam.

The dietician is the link between the patient and medical team or physician in assisting difficult decisions making about nutrition care.

List of Institutes of Nutrition and Dietetics in India — All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Women's University, University of Home Economics (Delhi University); Lady Irwin College, New Delhi; Osmania University-Hyderabad, University of Mumbai, Maharaja Syajiro University of Baroda, Vadodara; Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, Udaipur; Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad; Christian Medical College, Vellore ; Sri Ramachandra and Research Institute (Deemed University), Chennai, Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Apart from regular courses there are distance courses available for the aspirants who are interested to take this area of study.

There are different job avenues or opportunity to be self-employed. Trained people may get different designation when they start into the profession. Some of the specialised areas in dietetics include Clinical Dietitians, Community Dietitians, Management Dietitians, Consultant Dietitians, etc. They may get job in government sector or in the private sectors.



Updates:

Siemens Scholarship Programme: Siemens Scholarship Program 2018-19 is an initiative of Siemens India to support 1st year engineering students from the stream/ branches of Mechanical/Production, Electrical, Electronics/Instrumentation, Electronics and Telecommunication, Computers/Information Technology, Instrumentation. The scholarship is being offered by the Siemens India under their CSR initiative. Siemens Scholars who have graduated from this programme have been placed in Siemens as well as leading companies in various sectors like engineering, banking and finance. First-year engineering student of Government Engineering colleges can apply before August 27.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career counsellor, skill trainer and academic consultant and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

'Never enjoyed in comfort zone as an actor'

Anushka Sharma is all set to entertain her fans again with her film Sui Dhaaga*, in which she portrays a small town girl.* **IBNS-TWF** *brings some excerpts from her trailer launch interview*



What are your initial feelings about the film and its trailer launch?
The response of the trailer has been really overwhelming, positive and good, so I am very thrilled. *Sui Dhaaga* is a very special film made by Sharat Kataria, who had directed *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*. He has always been successful in telling a simple story but a very poignant, important one though in an entertaining way. *Sui Dhaaga* is a similar type of film. It is a film celebrating entrepreneurship, love and self reliance. Personally, I am very happy as an actor to do such a film. The film is much more than my different onscreen look and the audience will see various elements of the film in the course of the film's promotional campaign.

Why did you say yes to the script?
I was excited to read the script offered by Sharat (Sharat Kataria, director) as I have seen his last film and really loved it. But honestly, I said no to Sui Dhaaga initially because of the lack of self belief. I conveyed to Sharat that the script was good but I cannot portray the character as it is beyond my level. I was very afraid. I thought I won't be able to do justice to the character. But Sharat and Maneesh (Maneesh Sharma, producer) were extremely convinced that I could play the character. Later Sharat came to my house and explained to me what he thinks about the character and why I am appropriate to portray Mamta (Anushka's character in Sui Dhaaga) onscreen. I will be very honest, that I went into the film with Sharat's faith in me more than mine.

Did you learn weaving for the film?
I didn't weave earlier but did embroidery. I really enjoyed the whole process. I have seen my grandmother and mother doing weaving, so it was there in my memory. So when I started to do embroidery, I picked it very quickly in the course of the film. I am happy that I could do things which I didn't know earlier. So awareness about the life of a tailor, their skills or different kinds of arts increased.

The film also demonstrated financial crisis. Did you face similar situation in life?
I come from a typical middle class family. My father was in the Army but his salary was not much. My parents tried to give everything they could. There was a time when I had to participate in a dance competition in school and a certain fee was needed for the clothes (costume). So I was very excited and told mother that I have been selected. My mother was very happy and then asked about the fee. But when I told her the price of the cloth, she refused to pay citing the various loan amounts which were due to pay. I was devastated. As children, we don't realise what our parents sacrifice. But my mother didn't let my opportunity go and weaved and stitched my costume throughout the night. So I have gone through that phase when we didn't have money and lifestyle that I can provide to my family today but our parents never let us realise.

You have been living an urban lifestyle for quite sometime now since joining film industry. How did you feel the character of a small town girl internally?
It was actually a long process. The first step of the process was to get prepared mentally to play this character and I think it was needed to exclude things from myself rather than including. It is important to remove something from oneself rather than adding while playing any character. An actor can play any role. It's just that one needs people who believes in that actor like Sharat and Maneesh did in my case. So that belief is important. But honestly that does not happen often over here (in film industry). People usually cast one depending on how they understand his or her personality or what kind of film they have seen of that particular actor. So when a director or a producer take that kind of faith in one's talent then obviously it becomes a huge responsibility of the actor (to do justice). The same thing happened with me in Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi (Anushka's debut film) also. I knew that very few people wanted me to be part of that film so I had to prove to people who believed in me.

Do you think you came out of your comfort zone for the role in *Sui Dhaaga*?
I am actually never in the comfort zone of my life. I like to put myself in uncomfortable positions at all time specially as an actor. I was never in comfort zones while doing films like Pari or Sultan in the past. The character in Pari or Sultan were something I didn't do before. But Sui Dhaaga was different because of the submissive nature of Mamta's character. By no means, am I submissive but then I realised that even Mamta is not. So the discovery of Mamta as not a submissive woman was the starting point for me. I have never enjoyed myself in a comfort zone.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, AUGUST 26, 2018***

Full Moon on your solar return chart will usher in good results. Your creativity will shine so use this to further your ambitions. Artists, sportspersons, musicians and those in related fields will see a rise in their popularity and image. Income would rise and there could also be an additional source of income. You may be inclined to spend on luxury goods, entertainment, travel etc. Romance surprises you and this budding romance will have an impact on you. There could be some emotional swings but you need to draw on your inner resources and remain focused. You would see expansion of your social circle.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



There would be good relations among family members and good financial gain. You focus on having fun, enjoying romance and expressing yourself creatively. You would be able to give an unconventional perspective to your work and creativity. You spend quality time with your loved ones, family and children. There would be emphasis on your relationships as you feel they are more important to you than materialistic things. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level. You may discover new facets to your love life. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and fitness routine.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



Success and good fortune at work opens new horizons for expansion. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency.This period highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. It is a favorable time to open up conversations with loved ones, as intimate moments are most appealing both of you. Your heart and head pull you in different direction when domestic and family related decisions are to be taken. You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments and your ability to socialize and make connections. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature, speaking, etc., would figure more prominently in your life.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



You bring brilliancy and efficiency at work. You give a new approach to love, children and work on creative projects. A new set-up in existing relations or chances of formation of new relationship with people, are bright this week. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with family members. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel the part of whole, as this brings new opportunities and bring monetary gains. You have good team spirit and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers this brings harmony and joyous atmosphere at work place.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



This is a favorable time for learning something new, feeling comfortable in social situations and taking care of your hobbies. You are brilliant at dealing effectively with difficult projects at work. Increased connections and experiences come into picture. This is a period of growth as well as some form of blossoming or fruition. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities of love and the power of attraction, which may open the doors to new romantic relationships. You are bold and courageous in your approach when family related decisions are to be taken. You are highly motivated to indulge in your hobbies. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



Power, influence and authority are the keywords at this time. Your professional life brings rewards and recognition. You are working hard and inclined towards more detailed work. You would work in association of senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents and co-relate all activities to enhance the business and work opportunities. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another service-oriented capacity. You are able to influence people with your fresh approach and novel ideas. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



People and friends look upon you with more respect, tolerance and acceptance. You handle business meetings, people and express yourself more specifically about the issues. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering; you have to positively use your talents and efficiency. New associations and beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature at this time. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at home and work.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



This phase brings good-luck, love and romance. Personal relationships are dreamy and transitory and commitments are made and promises are honored. You would maintain balance in the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. Its right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professionals skills as a promotion or up-gradation in work area is likely to present itself. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You turn things around in the business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



You spend a lot of time in short frequent trips with your family and children, communicating with people and visiting relatives and friends. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor is especially strong. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasures, or romance during this expressive period. You might enjoy researching speculative ventures now. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You might just find that this is a period when you are at your most gracious-as long as you are truly listening instead of reacting. An overseas or long distance journey is on cards.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal many issues bravely and successfully. You may bring in changes in your lifestyle eve making small changes such as your hair-style, buy new attire etc. and spend time and money on entertainment and things that please you. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and connecting with people. You may feel a bit defeated by situations at home and work. Allow space and time for things to change on their own. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. You may visit religious places. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



The planetary configuration is indicative of more stability in personal relations and professional life. You have the tendency to compromise and adjust and take a softer approach while dealing with people at work and home. You may explore new equipment and improve working space as this brings more efficiency in your work. Family members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



You would share your interests and communicate beautifully with people around you. You might spend a lot of time in meeting friends and loved ones. The ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. Sometimes, it might be hard for you to work with others in a team work, if you feel disappointed, frustrated or restless, it would be better to find little more work to keep you busy. You may be especially focused on your family. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to be displaying a whole lot of self-discipline. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Health food, yoga and meditation recommended. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



Cordial relations in professional and personal relations are highlighted. Cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Close friends and family members would notice you for your more tolerant and broadminded nature. You would attract people with your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with important people in authority. You would show your love to your family and children. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing problems in relations for some time. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work.

Bhutan's isolation is the 'greatest mistake'



By Saket Suman

Conservation of the environment is one of the four pillars of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness philosophy but "the greatest mistake" the Himalayan nation can make is "to live in isolation", Daniel C Taylor, who has been engaged in social change and environmental conservation for over four decades, said here on Saturday.

Taylor was speaking on "Environmental Justice: Questions For The Future" on the closing day of the Mountain Echoes literary festival. Using a power point presentation, the well-regarded environmentalist behind the creation of two massive national parks around Mount Everest, one in China and the other in Nepal, explored the various stumbling blocks in the path of conservation.

Bhutan has mandated environmental preservation in its Constitution and preserves 60 per cent of its land under forest cover. But it is sandwiched between India and China, arguably among the most polluting countries in the world.

Responding to a question on similar lines, Taylor contended that Bhutan should not live in isolation.

He said that pollution and degradation of environment is not limited to one country or one region alone. "It is an ecosystem," he said, elaborating at length how pollution arising from China or India could have impacts on Bhutan.

On its part, Bhutan is a carbon-negative country and home to the highest percentage — more than 51 per cent — of protected land in Asia.

"The greatest mistake that Bhutan can make is to remain isolated. The challenge for Bhutan is to work with both India and China. At the same time, it also needs to work with the world. Bhutan has to take an active role in teaching the world about environmental justice because you have done tremendous work in conserving the natural habitats in your country," said the 71-year-old.

Taylor said that India and China "are themselves countries in disruption" and thus there was a great deal that the landlocked nation can impart to its neighbours.

Directly referring to China, he said that he worked there for several years and saw the wide-ranging impacts of its policies on the environment.

He pointed out that being so close to the China and India, Bhutan would see implications of pollution arising from its neighbours despite its enormous forest cover.

"We are all riding one giant ball called Earth, which is headed into a future — a future which may be frightening. What each of us can do is teach each other," Taylor said.

In his 45-minute session, Taylor also presented some rare photographs, audio and visual clippings of his journeys through the Himalayas.

Comparing two photographs — one taken during his first visit to the Paro valley some 60 years ago and the other taken just four days ago — he showed that the forest cover increased in the Paro Valley, despite the construction of the Paro International Airport.

"No country is developed or underdeveloped. All countries are developing. Aeroplanes, better homes along with more trees should be the future," he contended.

Mountain Echoes literary festival is an initiative of the India-Bhutan foundation and Siyahi, a Jaipur-based literary consultancy agency.

The ninth edition of the festival will reach its culmination on Saturday evening. *(IANS)*

(Saket Suman is in Thimphu at the invitation of the organisers of Mountain Echoes literary festival. He can be contacted at saket.s@ians.in)

Photo courtesy: Google Images

"Chance can allow you to accomplish a goal every once in a while, but consistent achievement happens only if you love what you are doing."
--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Aadhar authentication

UNIQUE Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) requires facial recognition for Aadhar authentication. UIDAI circulars have been asking for Aadhar authentication to be made "more inclusive". That means facial recognition in addition to fingerprints/ iris scans. There have been too many failures in fingerprints/iris scans and the Supreme Court had been apprised of that. These failures could have happened due to people accessing rations or purchasing new SIM cards. Aadhar is expected to deliver welfare. It is extending its sway everywhere. It has to be limited to welfare and the glitches should be fixed. The trust in Aadhar is falling. Earlier, one was told that fingerprints could be almost foolproof. However, iris scans were added to make it fully authentic. The objectives seemed to recede in fulfilment. UIDAI submitted to the Supreme Court a proof of its concept study. It showed Aadhar authentication had risen from 83% to 99% among elderly people. Face recognition supplemented fingerprints. Experience is varied in other countries. Agents have misused Aadhar cards. That causes worry. There is no magic solution of the authentication problem which eliminates inclusion and exclusion errors. Prevention of theft, hacking, breach of privacy and criminal misuse may not be possible. Besides, internet connectivity in India is poor. The use of Aadhar should be limited and there should be other backup systems.

The revelation some months ago by a journalist that the personal information of an Aadhar card holder could be accessed by paying a certain fee to the agents to which the process of Aadhar enrolment was entrusted to, has raised the hackles of many. Edward Snowden, the noted whistle blower and former CIA agent who is now seeking refuge in Russia has been warning the citizens of India time and again that their private information including details of their bank accounts and other financial details were available to anyone who seeks to access them. Those in the Government have chosen to brazen it out but it is the privacy of the citizen that is being breached here and this is a serious matter. The system it appears is not foolproof and the UIDAI authorities have been experimenting from fingerprints as an authenticating instrument to the iris and now to face recognition. How much of intrusion can a citizen subject himself/ herself to? What is even more serious is the fact that the Aadhar card has become so easy to acquire and even aliens are getting them at a price. In other words they can also avail Government subsidies through the Public Distribution System. The Aadhar needs to go through a rigorous system of checks and balances.

Religious Freedom and Rights of Children

By HH Mohrmen

Can we believe that in this time and age we would still have parents who would not send (in spite of it available free of cost) their kids to school? And how can parents even withdraw their wards from school just because they were taught to do so by the leader(s) of their church? Can we believe that there are parents who would refuse to get their children medication and would also refuse support from the government Public Distribution System (PDS)? Can a citizen be an island to himself/herself and refuse to have to do anything with the government?

In the last few months this column has brought to light the existence of a religious sect (particularly in the Khasi-Jaintia part of the state) which bars its members from obtaining any assistance from the government including food under Public Distribution System. Many months later the government has finally taken cognizance of the fact that the members of this religious group are doing more harm than good to its own community. The Deputy Chief Minister P. Tynsong very recently told the press that the government has been aware of this problem since February last during the election to the State Assembly.

Preliminary studies indicate that the group is not yet organised but their presence is acknowledge by their neighbours or members of the church they used to belong to. This group is obvious to others because of their peculiar lifestyles and their attitude towards any of government schemes and projects. In many cases this group which is yet to sever ties with its parent church and attend the usual Sunday services of the church but they would have their own service in different locations at a different point of time in the week. It is learnt that the majority of the followers of this group in Jaintia Hills in particular are from the two major protestant denominations in the area. However, there are also members of other Christian denominations too.

The initial impression was that this was a stray case and it was assumed that the group existed in few places, but it was only when I accompanied my daughter during her field study to many villages in West Jaintia Hills that the sheer magnitude of this group came to light. A student of Public Health my daughter was concerned about the fact that there is a considerable gap between people who avail and those refuse vaccination in the different parts of the district. She embarked on the study to understand the issue.

It was during her study that we found that the followers of this group are almost everywhere in the district, and since her target area are villages which are within the Nartiang, Ummulong and Thangbuli Community Health Centres, it was found that the groups are present in many villages in the area. The followers of this group maintain a very special relationship amongst themselves and it was strengthened by their worship which is conducted in the houses of the members, or, at other times as reported in the press, even in the forest.

We have many stories where people who were in government jobs have resigned their posts because it is against their beliefs; there are teachers who resigned from their jobs and again these are not stray cases. Of course they are well within their rights to follow which ever religion they choose and they can worship whichever God they wish to but this group is totally antagonistic towards anything provided by the government. They are not only against enrolling themselves in the central government Aadhar system but they are also against using voters identity cards and to even exercise their right to vote in the last election.

It is also well within their rights, especially if they are adults, to refuse to take medication, consult the doctor and completely rely only on the power of prayer and the use of mustard oil and water to heal themselves, but what about the children? How can the parents refuse to provide medication for their wards when they are sick? It was found that almost all the members of this group refuse to get their babies, children and even the mothers themselves vaccinated. This is a very serious problem because if they refuse vaccination and medication, they not only put themselves in danger, but the entire village and even the state at risk.

They maintain an adamant attitude that they would not take any medication but would only rely on the power of prayer. There are families that would even scold the ASHA and the Anganwadi workers for taking us to meet them. And in many cases the ASHA and Anganwadi workers would avoid taking us to the members of this group because they were afraid of being reprimanded. These village workers had a tough time dealing with this group because they refuse to cooperate with them.

The question therefore is, what is the Government doing? When we have parents who put the lives of their children at risk isn't its government's duty to protect them? What is the point of Government providing free medical assistance to its citizens when we have groups that are against it? What is the point of providing medical insurance for the citizens when they are not going to avail it? What will happen if one of the members of this group comes into contact with a disease which is contagious in nature and can spread all over the place? Can the Government remain a mute spectator to what is happening?

There were reports that the members of this group have also stopped sending their kids to school and they even withdrew students who are still attending school. The adults can do whatever they like with their lives but how can the government allow them to play with the lives of their wards and put the future of the children in jeopardy? Isn't this tantamount to denying the children below fourteen years of age their basic right to free and compulsory education which is guaranteed by Article 14 of the Constitution? The twin goals of providing basic education and the institution of Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan are also to provide free and compulsory education to the children below 14 years of age but it has failed these kids.

This also defeats the very foundation for which the SSA was instituted. The question is, how can it be that the case of parents refusing to send their kids to school and withdrawing them from school, escape the scrutiny of the Department of Education? Why wasn't this withdrawal of students from school reported to the higher authorities?

The story of one SSA teachers in East Jaintia hills district is amusing and it also puts the headmaster of the school in a dilemma. The teacher resigned from their jobs and as we all know SSA teachers do not receive regular payment of their salaries; the said teacher was due to get a few months of salary from the government. But after the teacher had resigned, he/she refused to even collect the salary due to him/her. This has put the headmaster in a Catch -22 situation as he does not know what to do with the money.

But the problem which is more serious is that the group refused to even avail the support provided by the government through the Public Distribution System. Of course it is also within one's right to refuse PDS if one can afford it, but can it be at the cost of the health of the children? It is true that each and every citizen of this country is guaranteed by the constitution that he can follow whichever religion he likes, but can this freedom be misused to deny the children their basic human rights of health care and education and even food?

The point to note is that the parents by not giving their children health care and education which government is providing free of cost, have deliberately failed in their duties as parents to their children. So is this not the right juncture for the Government to intervene? This is a serious situation which can have drastic consequences on the health of the State and the future of the children and the Government cannot just turn a blind eye to what is going on.

Going up in smoke that never was: A 100 million

All those who jumped the gun land up in deep slush

By Aditya Aamir

Flood waters that badly wounded Kerala's present and jeopardized its future are receding but controversies swirl and one of them involves the sandy country of UAE "which is a home away from home" for the Malayali, according to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. Turns out 'home away from home', while showing concern for the Malayali in distress, did not offer the "aid of Rs 700 crores" as claimed by Vijayan. UAE ambassador to India Ahmed Albanna confirms that no aid offer of Rs 700 crore was made by the UAE. This places the Vijayan government in Kerala, the state with the communists in power, in an untenable position. The CM, who jumped the gun, also made others to jump the gun, including the Congress with Randeep Surjewala taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi by tweeting "Na Madad Karunga, Na Madad Lene Doonga."

The unhappy part was that the people of Kerala, who were overwhelmed by "the UAE offer" and grateful for the largesse at a time when Malayalis were literally neck-deep in water and drowning in a mass despair, have become victims to a "ruse". Sections of the media also went overboard and without checking facts celebrated with the state and the people the "aid from UAE".

A simultaneous left versus right faceoff further muddied the waters and the Centre was a sitting duck for trolls not only from India but also from the Gulf, who were "misled" by local newspaper reports, with even Pakistani expats in the Gulf joining the tirade against the Government of India, giving it a communal Hindu-versus-Muslim colour. "Was the Rs 700 crore UAE aid floated to malign India?" asks a television channel.

Another TV channel which made it a business to lambast the Modi government for standing in the way of UAE's heart-felt offer has suddenly gone silent. Now, leaders of various political parties, who too "jumped the gun", are falling over each other to get out, while in the act of shifting gears to take in the new developments.

The "embarrassment" spans an ocean and the rulers of the UAE are equally caught in the squall. The UAE in reality never "put out any numbers". It was Pinarayi who announced that the "crown prince of UAE has told the Prime Minister that $100 million, Rs 700 crore in aid." Apparently a prominent UAE businessman of Indian-origin hailing from Kerala was the source of Vijayan's revelation.

Now, it emerges that the UAE was only "constituting a committee to consider aid" and how much should the amount be. Friday, the UAE came out in the open and announced that it never offered any aid of Rs 700 crore. So, why did the PM butt in and "thank" the UAE government? The Centre says to that now that "countries do that routinely."

TV channels such as India Today TV, which mounted a scathing attack on the Centre "for refusing the aid" are fighting to keep the canard alive. Thursday night journalist Rajdeep Sardesai was persistent in demanding an answer to the question: "What if it was a BJP ruled state, would the Centre refuse?" Sections of the media have covered themselves in silt post the Kerala floods and are not ready to get out of their own slush.

Bottom-line: No state can aspire to usurp "external affairs" from the Centre and no media can call for such a switch. But that was what nearly happened, no apologies sought or offered.

The "embarrassment" spans an ocean and the rulers of the UAE are equally caught in the squall. The UAE in reality never "put out any numbers". It was Pinarayi who announced that the "crown prince of UAE has told the Prime Minister that $100 million, Rs 700 crore in aid." Apparently a prominent UAE businessman of Indian-origin hailing from Kerala was the source of Vijayan's revelation. Now, it emerges that the UAE was only "constituting a committee to consider aid" and how much should the amount be. Friday, the UAE came out in the open and announced that it never offered any aid of Rs 700 crore. So, why did the PM butt in and "thank" the UAE government? The Centre says to that now that "countries do that routinely."

Union Minister KJ Alphons as called for charges under the National Security Act against the mischief mongers but that is not going to happen, or will it?

Point is, flood and aid apart, the Kerala government has other battles to fight, notably the one against Tamil Nadu regarding waters stored and released from the Mullaperiyar Dam. In the dock for allegedly not stopping water flow into the dam from Tamil Nadu, the EPS government says "it's all bull"; if anybody is to blame, it's Kerala which "released water from all dams at one go."

"Kerala's accusations towards Tamil Nadu are false and baseless. If you say, excess water was discharged from one dam (Mullaperiyar) then how did water reach all parts of Kerala? The excess discharge of water from 80 dams caused flood in Kerala," Tamil Nadu Chief Minister EK Palaniswami said Friday, rejecting Kerala's "false and baseless" claims.

All in all, the climate and weather seems Against Kerala and Malayalis such as Yours Truly are disappointed. Things could have been managed much better. The people of Kerala should take things into their hands, not get into political and communal fights, and convince Modi that it's the Centre's duty to lift Kerala out f the waterhole. A mass signature campaign to inundate Modi, flood him with millions of signatures, might do the trick. Half of the 1.25 billion will add their names to the campaign and, by God, it will work! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Technocrat turned Politician

Editor,

Many people are not aware of the academic and professional achievements of Mr Tathagata Roy, being sworn in as the Governor of Meghalaya on August 25 2018. Having a brilliant academic career Mr Roy graduated from Bengal Engineering College, Sibpur (now IIEST and erstwhile premier rather oldest Engineering College of India approaching Bi-centenary) as a Civil Engineer in 1965. He had served successfully the Metro Rail Project of Kolkata as General Manager. He is a former Professor and founder head of the Department of Construction Engineering of Jadavpur University. He is also a law-graduate and is an acclaimed International Arbitrator. He is a prolific writer and authored many books.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

Why is R&R Colony a taxi parking zone?

Editor,

Relief and Rehabilitation Colony (RR Colony) Rynjah, Shillong is an absolute residential colony, which was originally designed and promoted by Central Govt and handed over to the allotees through the State Govt. in the 1950s. This is well planned colony and its roads, water and sanitation are well maintained by the State Govt with the cooperation of the local body.

In the recent past the road passing through R&R Colony towards Umpling and beyond is no longer safe for pedestrians. It has become an deal place for Shillong Taxi drivers for their safe parking zone on both sides of the road. Numerous taxis are parked spreading on this road throughout the day. The map of Shillong city shows that this Colony is purely a residential colony. Schools, State Govt Dispensary, proposed Cchildren's Park are located here. There are 275 residential houses spread over the entire colony. In spite of it being a residential colony, Shillong Traffic Police divert the traffic right through middle of the Colony and also allow taxis to park on the side of small residential roads. This has made the road more congested and reduced the size considerably. All this leads to a nagging situation while walking on the road. Elderly people and senior citizens are finding it unsafe to walk.

Moreover nowadays Govt does not give attention to repair the broken roads. No footpath has been constructed on some segments of the road which again lead makes it unsafe for pedestrians.

The scenario is worsened during rains and when there are festivals observed by the residents. It is my fervent request to the District authorities to look into the matter and show mercy to pedestrians, especially senior citizens. Let them walk hassle free.

Yours etc.,
Tapan Palit,
Via email

Kindness gets us closer to God

Editor,

We don't need to walk too far to practice benevolence. If there is empathy our eyes can spot many needy people around. They are standing with their empty buckets into which we can pour out our generosity. Of course, Ramkrishna Paramhansa's foremost teaching includes -- 'practicing to see God in every being'. The idea is too grand. But for that, the eyes should not be blurred by the mist of discrimination and expectation.

A couple of weeks ago I noticed two children a boy and girl aged about 11 and 9 years respectively, going around from door to door at Upper Mawprem carrying just two bunches of tender stems of squash (chayote). Those green stems were from their own garden at Mawngap. The drizzling rain in the darkness of the evening, about 7:30 PM, had not dampened their spirits to find buyers for their products. Without an umbrella, they were almost drenched. I realized they were struggling to sell their last two bunches of squash stems for Rs 20 only.

I'm sure most are not aware of the real woes of such poor vendors. But we do know that they shout right outside our doors every day with some vegetables on their shoulders/hands. What is invisible here is that they also carry the load of family anxieties which in fact pushes them to toil and sweat. And, on our part, without a sense of compassion, we inconsiderately talk down to these simple people and reduce the prices of their vegetables to half, or even more. When it gets darker, we take more advantage. We don't spare a thought as to how many households they have visited throughout the day to sell their handful of perishable items. Usually their total load of green produce is worth under Rs 300. Just make a rough assessment of their daily earnings. Moreover, that income would also cover their bus fare, tea and snacks etc. It is only a tiny sum that finally remains with them to help run their families.

I called out to those cheery siblings from Mawngap, and asked a few questions about their family. They spontaneously shared with me what made them go around to sell the vegetables. Tears welled up in my eyes. Their father died two months ago. The mother, who has still not been able to reconcile herself with the immature demise of the husband, is now struggling to support the family. Since the mother can't earn much, these two children help supplement the family income.

When I said that I would buy their squash stems, the kids were thrilled. This is how "JOY comes so easily" for the poor! It's only possible because their hearts are clean and the needs are minimum. I am certain that the amount of joy these siblings felt must be far more than the joy that might be experienced by a rich businessman who might have earned a whopping Rs 2 lakh.

Is this not a greater contribution of the under-aged kids towards their poor parents? This must inspire younger children who know nothing about the pain of poverty. How nice it would be if the people who are better off show more kindness and add happiness to the lives of the poor around them. Simply buying their items without grumbling, if possible with an expression of compassion, certainly gets us closer to the Almighty. Yes, in our town itself there are thousands of small kids helping their parents (mostly single parents) to earn and thus help the family. In case those children do not work, the hearth and home will just crumble; in other words, they will starve to death. Is not the Government regulation against child labour just a farce when it has practically nothing to hold out and pull them through the hardship of living?

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

''HIV does not make people dangerous to know, so you can shake their hands and give them a hug: Heaven knows they need it.''

-- Princess Diana

The Shillong Times

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Change at helm for DMK

THE way is clear for MK Stalin to take over the mantle as President of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a post that his now-deceased father M Karunanidhi had held for decades. With all 65 district secretaries unanimously supporting his candidature and since his was the only nomination, the formal announcement,Tuesday is now only a formality. For now, there is little scope for dissent, even as the Karunanidhi family itself is deeply divided.

To the credit of Karnunanidhi, he has not left the party orphaned. In recent years he has put in place a line of succession by selecting and keeping Stalin at the head of the party, but a step below himself. That had Stalin functioning in two major capacities when his father was alive: as working president of the party since 2017; and as deputy chief minister under Karunanidhi as CM from 2009 to 2011. In a scenario where some of Karunanidhi's other sons and daughters tried to emerge as major power centres, the rank and file was left with no confusion as to who would succeed the ageing leader after his demise. This was unlike the scenario in the AIADMK, where J Jayalalitha at its head for many years consciously avoided creating a succession line and left it to the party to choose the next leader.

Both styles have their merits and demerits. In a democracy, the people are the ultimate authority to decide who should lead them. Though there is considerable confusion in the AIADMK after Jayalalitha's demise, the next elections would show who will emerge as the tallest leader in the present ruling party in the state. The positive side of Karunanidhi's decision to line up a successor meant that there is no confusion at present. But, the smooth power transition in the DMK now is perhaps only an eyewash The other powerful leaders in the party, namely Stalin's brother MK Alagiri, is unlikely to remain silent for long. How dissent would shape up in the party is not easy to foresee, though.

For now, Stalin would call all the shots in the party, and he is sure to set himself on the course to grabbing power in the state in the next assembly polls four years hence; or he might even try and pull down the present shaky AIADMK ministry sooner than later. His would now be the last word in the party, and he could go any length unlike in the times when his father took all the decisions. Stalin's smooth succession as the DMK president means he would now demonstrate the strength to effectively lead the party. It sends out significant signals to national politics as well.

A personal statement from a Person Living with HIV (PLHIV)

By Barry Leslie Kharmalki

One of the challenges that NGOs, Civil Society Network are facing in tackling the HIV epidemic in our State as well as the whole country is STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION. It was really shocking for me to read the local dailies where no less a person than the CEM of the KHADC, H S Shylla, the framing of the amendment to Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act 1997 was, "aimed at protecting the community from imminent threat of deadly diseases such as HIV-AIDS which are through marriage with bus and truck drivers from outside the state, migrant workers including drug addicts."

A vernacular daily headlined the news as, "KHADC Bill to protect from the disease of HIV-AIDS." Never in a million years would I have dreamt of such a discriminatory and stigmatising statement from a public leader. It would have been alright if it was anybody else but that a law maker and a person who is expected to have vast knowledge on every subject matter could say something like that and that too in the media is shocking and disheartening.

Bah HS Shylla still doesn't know what 'Stigmatising & Discrimination' (or maybe he does)means. To stigmatise or discriminate is too see an individual or a group of people as inferior because of their status, an attribute or characteristic; In other words, a biased or unfair judgement or treatment of a person or groups on the basis of prejudice

Mr Shylla, stigmatizing and discrimination is not OK. It is a breach not only of various Human Rights Laws but also a violation of the Law of Mankind and above all the Law of God. So why are you Stigmatizing & Discriminating ?

1. Lack of knowledge on HIV (routes of transmission, care and treatment)

Mr Shylla's statement to the media clearly shows that he lacks the basic information on the subject matter. According to media reports he has termed HIV, "Jingpang Kynsha" (Dreaded Disease). First of all HIV is not a jingpang(disease) but a virus that destroys the immune system of a human body. So please educate yourself before giving out false and misleading information to the masses.

If Mr Shylla had read up a bit before making a public statement, he would have known that HIV is no longer Jingpang Kynsha (dreaded disease) because it is a manageable infection. As a Person Living with HIV (PLHIV) I can tell Shylla and others in the media that with the medication and support I get from our service providers such as Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART) and psycho- social support, my HIV viral load is below 20, which means that I already have viral suppression and that the chances of other people getting infected from me are very slim; almost NIL in fact.

2. Linking the infection with Moral Behaviour and Personal Irresponsibility

This irresponsible act of HS Shylla would only lead to magnification of the problem. According to Shylla and I quote, "Ka lynti rung jong katei ka khlam ka dei naka jingshong kha khleh bad ki trok draibar, ki draibar bos jong ki bar jylla bad nongbylla bar jylla" (the route for this plague (HIV-AIDS)is through mixed marriages with truck drivers, bus drivers from outside the state and with migrant labourers). First of all does, Shylla have any data/ statistics to back up his statement or did he say it just because he had to say something? Wise men talk because they have something to say. Fools because they have to say just something.

There are four routes for HIV transmission and if Shylla could only think of Shongkha Khleh or intermarriage (sexual route) then he seriously needs help. I would say only a 'PERVERT' would give such a comment to link an infection with moral behavior or personal irresponsibility. I wouldn't be surprised if he now states 'Diabetes ka dei ka jingpang kynsha (Diabetes is a dreaded disease) because to an extent and from what I have learnt Diabetes is also tied to Personal Irresponsibility.

Look at Mizoram the HIV epidemic is there not because of 'bar jylla' (outsiders)or draibar trok (truck drivers) or inter community marriage and in the South Indian States not because of just addiction or inter-community marriages. You cannot generalize an epidemic because you want to pull out some political stunt for mass support. It is grossly irresponsible.

3. Why the Stigmatisation &Discrimination? This is because we associate HIV with certain communities' behaviours and characteristics and Mr Shylla has clearly associated HIV with "Bar Jylla" (outsiders) and Drug Addicts. Does he even know how many people are HIV positive in our State of Meghalaya? Does he even know how many are outsiders and drug addicts from the 3400 + PLHIV in Meghalaya?Most of the People Living with HIV in Meghalaya are not "bar jylla" (outsiders) or "drug addicts". They are people from the Khynriam, Pnar, Bhoi and War community with no history of association with outsiders and truck/bus drivers or even drug addicts. Readers will be amazed at the statistics. From the 3400+ HIV+ in Meghalaya approximately 220 are from the High Risk Groups (Injecting Drug Users, Female Sex Workers and Men Having Sex with Men combined). Out of these 220, only about 50 People are from the DRUG using community or IDU).

We also have 168 Children living with HIV. I don't know what definition Mr Shylla will give them. So if you can't be Kind, please be Quiet.

And frankly I don't see how the Amendment to the Lineage Act is going to help mitigate the HIV 'epidemic' in our state since clearly HIV infection is not because of Shongkha Khleh (mixed marriages) and Drug addiction? It would be prudent on the part of Shylla and his ilk not to generalize the epidemic because it will only bring confusion and chaos.

NACO with MACS already have intervention programs for the HRGs in place and they are doing a great job in tackling the spread of HIV. What I fear is that, with such big statement comes fatal consequences and these marginalized communities will go into hiding and will not avail the existing services. That will make matters worse. Over the last three decades , the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (NACO) Govt of India had been pumping funds into our state to help in tackling the HIV epidemic. On a daily basis, we advocate for better infrastructures and services, rehabilitation centers, social re- integration programmes, welfare schemes for PLHIV and other marginalized groups but till date the support from the State Govt has been very minimal. We look at our future with uncertainty. If NACO doesn't give us our medications will the State or the KHADC provide us medication?

We have come a long way in our fight against HIV. It has taken us decades to educate people on such issues and to challenge Stigma and Discrimination. So don't go to the media and say things that will have an adverse impact on the hard work that people have done.

Parliament has passed the historic Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 on April 11, 2017. The Act prohibits discrimination against people living with HIV (PLHIVs).

In line with Stigma and Discrimination, Chapter 2, Clause 4 of the Act says " No person shall by words, either spoken or written , publish, propagate , advocate or communicate by signs or by visible representation or otherwise the feeling of hatred against any PLHIV or group of PLHIV in general or specifically or disseminate, broadcast or display any information , advertisement or notice, which may reasonably be construed to demonstrate an intention to propagate hatred or which is likely to expose PLHIV to hatred , discrimination or physical violence"

Does Mr Shylla know that by making such a thoughtless statement inciting hatred, he is breaking the law? And as section 37 of the Act says, he is liable to be prosecuted because,"Notwithstanding any action that may be taken under any other law for the time being in force, whoever contravenes the provisions of Section 4 shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than three months but which may extend to two years and with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees, or with both."

Instead of inciting prejudice and hatred, Mr Shylla would have been appreciated if he could develop policies and guidelines that will help the people of the state rather than by playing God and judging every one.

(Barry L Kharmalki is Field Mentor and Consultant, Family Health International - Harm Reduction Project by NACO for Injecting DRUG USERS and other Marginalised Groups in Meghalaya. Also living with HIV – diagnosed in 2009, he is an HIV activist and treasurer of the Meghalaya State Network of Positive People)

Exploring The Horrors of Partition

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

In contrast to the story of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan as an epiphenomenal event of Independence, the division of British India signaled a unique rupture in which the creation of borders became the defining traumatic event of that history. Moving away from familiar discourses of Independence, it may be argued that the history of the 1947 Partition is a history of borders in which the geographical borders drawn to separate and establish the independent nations of India and Pakistan are at once a concretely historical division and an incomprehensible site of trauma. The border becomes the site of the simultaneity between empirically known realities that constitute specific historical contexts and the overwhelming experience of history that exceeds immediate understanding. From the borders of the 1947 Partition, the subcontinent inherited what can be called "a geography of trauma" - a conceptual schema that is at once a geographical and national reality in which people live and an ungraspable experience that refuses boundaries.

Horrors of its partition left scars on India's freedom from the British rule The reverberations of the event over the last seventy years have been encapsulated in several books, plays, and other forms of media. Indian Partition inspired impressive amount of historical, fictional and analytical texts and it is really difficult to find a new angle of research. But the recently published books from Penguin, Cambridge Scholars Publishing and other publishers reveal the unexpected nuances hidden under the layers of textuality the event has already gathered by avoiding the traditional Hindu -Muslim perspectives.

Written by the first President of India, India Divided traces the origins and growth of the Hindu-Muslim conflict, gives the summary of the several schemes for the partition of India which were put forth, and points out the essential ambiguity of the Lahore Resolution. Finally, it concludes that the solution for the Hindu-Muslim issue should be sought in the formation of a secular state, with cultural autonomy for the different groups that make up the nation. Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie is an epic novel that opens up with a child being born at midnight on 15th August 1947, just at a time when India is achieving Independence from centuries of foreign British colonial rule. Highlighting the relation between father and son and a nation yet in its nascent stage, it is an enchanting family adventure with lots of human drama and shocking summoning.

Bitter Fruit presents the best collection of Manto's writings, from his short stories, plays and sketches, to portraits of cinema artists, a few pieces on himself. Bitter Fruit includes stories like A Wet Afternoon, The Return, A Believer s Version, Toba Tek Singh, Colder than Ice and many others. This collection brings together some of Manto's finest stories, ranging from his chilling recounting of the horrors of Partition to his portrayal of the underworld. Powerful and deeply moving, these stories remain as relevant today as they were first published. Mottled Dawn by Saadat Hasan Manto is a collection of stories based on the India-Pakistan partition. The stories written around 1947 put forward the most tragic events in the history of the subcontinent.

Ismat Chughtai in Lifting the Veil explored female sexuality with unparalleled frankness and examined the political and social mores of her time. Nisid Hajari's Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition shows how Partition, which has created such a wide gulf between two countries whose people have so much in common, has given birth to global terrorism and dangerous proliferation. On a backdrop India's struggle for independence, Laila, an orphaned daughter of a distinguished Muslim family, fights for her own independence from the claustrophobia of a traditional life. With its beautiful evocation of India, its political insight and unsentimental understanding of the human heart,

Sunlight on a Broken Column, first published in 1961, is a classic of Muslim life. With India's partition in 1947 as its reference point, the novel presents a limitless canvas against which the most extraordinary trial in the history of mankind runs its course.Maloy Krishna Dhar's Train to India is a graphic and moving account of that turbulent and unforgotten era of Bengal History.As a young boy, Maloy Krishna Dhar, made the perilous journey to India from the East Pakistan. The partion in Bengal had its share of tragedy, of lives unmade and lost, but it is relatively less chronicled than events in Punjab. As a young boy, Amitav Ghosh's narrator in The Shadow Lines travels across time through the tales of those around him, traversing the unreliable planes of memory, unmindful of physical, political and chronological borders. Bits and pieces of stories, both half-remembered and imagined, come together in his mind until he arrives at an intricate, interconnected picture of the world where borders and boundaries mean nothing, mere shadow lines that we draw dividing people and nations.

The Broken Mirror by Krishna Baldev Vaid tells the story of Beero and his group of friends against a backdrop of partition of India. Beero's passage through adolescence is told through a series of eccentric characters. When partition becomes a reality, in a time of terror and carnage, the insane turn out be the only ones sane. If Partition affected the lives of Sindhi Hindus, it also changed things for the Sindhi Muslims.Kamleshwar's Kitne Pakistan dared to ask crucial questions about the making and writing of history. A sensitive and thoughtful look at the lasting effects of Partition on everyday people, Amritsar to Lahore describes a journey across the contested border between India and Pakistan in 1997, the fiftieth anniversary of Partition. Offering both the perspective of hindsight and a troubling vision of the future, Amritsar to Lahore presents a compelling argument against the impenetrability of boundaries and the tragic legacy of lands divided. Manto's stories were mostly written against the backdrop of the Partition.

In Unbordered Memories, Sindhis from India and Pakistan make imaginative entries into each other's worlds. Many stories in this volume testify to the Sindhi Muslims' empathy for the world inhabited by the Hindus, and the Indian Sindhis' solidarity with the turbulence experienced by Pakistani Sindhis. *(Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee is Associate Professor and Head PG Dept. of English Dum Dum Motijheel College and International Visiting Professor , Fairleigh Dickinson University , New Jersey. USA. He can be reached at profratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)*

TO THE EDITOR

Equitable Distribution of Property

Editor,

In our campaign for the Equitable Distribution of Self Acquired and Ancestral Property Act , many people that I come across have misunderstood the word Equitable for Equal. According to the dictionary meaning of the word, ' Equitable' means fair and just. Therefore we leave it to the wisdom of the parents to give to how much to whom. If in their wisdom the parents feel that the youngest daughter should inherit everything the law will not stop them but at least the word Equitable leaves them with an option.

Secondly, in our tradition, there is still a practice followed by many traditionalist, that when there is no daughter in a family , the moment the parents, more so the mother, dies then the mother's clan would lay claim to all the property including the house, thus leaving the sons literally out on a limb. A law that will allow the parents to WILL out their property to their sons , will protect the sons' rights from this outdated and unjust practice.

Thirdly, the whole world today revolves around the economy. The primary source of strength of a nation is its economy. A nation is strong if its economy is robust. So families that have the resources should economically empower all the children equitably otherwise how will the children and our Jaidbynriew become economically strong ?

In our campaign for the RTI Act and the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, the Maitshaphrang have always believed that if the general public are not aware first, of the pros and cons of the law we are demanding, it will be useless to have the law. We have therefore always placed the Act in the public domain so that the public can ask questions, criticize, offer suggestions and comments. The campaign for this particular law has been there for the past 30 years plus together with the Compulsory Registration of Marriage through articles in the print media, pamphlets, posters , house meetings and recently through social media.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Gary Marbaniang for his comments and critiques and we have taken note of both his article and letter to the editor. We welcome all constructive opinions.

Yours etc.,
Michael N Syiem,
Via email

Are the fish now certified safe?

Editor,

The Government has allowed the sale of imported fish from August 23, 2018. We, as consumers are in the dark as to whether any tests have been conducted by the concerned authorities to ascertain whether these imported fish are free of formalin or other harmful chemicals. Will the Health Department, Food & Civil Supplies Department and Department of Fisheries kindly enlighten us? As consumers we surely have the right to know!

Yours etc.,
Dr. G. Kar Pyrkayastha
Shillong -4

Prevent Misuse of State Funds

Editor,

Pakistan's new government has banned the discriminatory use of state funds and first class air travel by officials and leaders, including the president and the prime minister, as part of its austerity drive.The decisions were made at a Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on August 24, 2018. It has been decided that all the top government officials, including the president, prime minister, chief justice, senate chairman, speaker national assembly and the chief ministers will travel in business class. Even the army chief was not allowed first class travel and always used business class in Pakistan.That the Prime Minister has also decided to stop using special planes for foreign visits or domestic travel and to use the business class only is laudable.

In view of the devastating flood situation in a major part of the country can the ministers, political leaders and bureaucrats et al not take a cue from and emulate the exemplary austerity measures taken by their counterparts in the neighbouring country to provide additional flood-relief and spend taxpayers money for a benevolent and noble cause?

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

Mawmluh Sordar's ill conceived plan

Editor,

I was drawn to a letter to the editor captioned, 'VISIT TO KREM MAWMLUH' (ST Aug l1, 2018).As far as my knowledge is concerned, such a misadventure is no longer news to me. The fact of the matter is that such misadventures have been carried out by some of the villagers and the Sordar of Mawmluh village which dates back to the early part of 1912 as per the records which show that they continue to encroach into the Sohra Syiemship land till date by way of cultivation, mining and tourism. In 1840, the Syiem of Sohra leased out the Par Syiem and other areas in Lum Lawbah for coal mining to the British Company where subsequently about 80% of the area has been declared to fall under Mawsmai and Mawmluh elakas by virtue of the classification that they became the non-states or British villages. In such a misadventure, the Sordar of Mawmluh filed a case in the court of the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi & Jaintia Hills against the Syiem of Sohra. In the judgment of December 9, 1927, WA Cosgrave, D.C., K & J Hills fixed the boundary from the 2nd mile stone of Cherra-Shella or Cherra-Mawmluh Road up to the precipice at Kshaid Umsaw falls(vide Mr. David Roy, SDC's sketch map). Further, as per the Boundary case. No1. of 1937-38 and map sheet NO.78-0/11-12 AG.Patton, Secretary to the Govt of Assam(Revenue) notified the boundary in the Official Govt Gazette on March 5, 1941.

In contravention of the above court's order and notification the Sordar of Mawmluh and his cohorts erected a signage in the Sohra Syiemship territory welcoming the passers- by to Mawmluh village and through your esteemed daily has illegally claimed the Dam-Um Cave(related to Meghalayan Age) by distorting the historical name to Krem Mawmluh which is non- existent in any available records. Since Mawmluh Village is still continuing to perform the annual rituals according to the traditional religious beliefs, I think it is unwise for the village elders to commit sacrilege, lest God forbid the bad moon may arise in Mawmluh Village.

On behalf of the Dorbar Shnong Mawki Syiem and as deputed by the Syiem and the Dorbar of Sohra Syiemship, we welcome each and every one to visit the Dam-Um Cave (related to Meghalayan Age) which is located on the south eastern part of the MCCL factory under Sohra Syiemship.

Yours etc.,
C. Khongngain
Rangbah Shnong
Mawki Syiem, Sohra
Syiemship.

"Every great work, every great accomplishment, has been brought into manifestation through holding to the vision, and often just before the big achievement, comes apparent failure and discouragement."

--- Samuel Smiles

The Shillong Times

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Doklam and beyond

A year has elapsed since the Doklam face-off between India and China. It appears that relations between the two countries are getting back to normal. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) started the process. Then came the informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President XI Jinping in Wuhan. The Chinese Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe visited Delhi last week. Chances of a major conflict seem to have been averted for the time being at least. The General was accompanied by top officials from the Central Military Commission of China. Both countries have decided to expand engagement between their armed forces relating to training, joint exercises and other professional interactions. Progress will be made towards a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on defence exchanges and cooperation. Confidence building measures will be given great boost. That will thaw relations across the disputed border. The steps taken show strategic sapience. Greater interaction at the Brigade level will contribute to amity and the Chinese officials paved the way for progress towards that objective. That will defuse all Doklam-like crises.

However, India's strengthening military muscles raise Chinese hackles. Chinese are reported to be still in occupation in Doklam. Border incursions in 1962 cast a long shadow. Beijing is trying to curtail India's influence in South Asia. The disputed LOAC is still a very prickly issue and ironing out differences seems a remote possibility. Talks have not helped but an understanding about the border dispute alone can bring about stability. Collaboration between India and China is a key to economic development between the two neighbours and India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj is harping on diplomacy to avoid armed conflict. However, what is jarring is the repeated harangue by the President of the Indian National Congress, Rahul Gandhi who is flagging the Doklam issue at international forums instead of addressing the issue at home. When it comes to border disputes and national interests, political leaders are not expected to play politics. The country is bigger than any political party or government. In fact it is the remit of all political parties to sit across the table and chalk out strategies on how to defuse Doklam like crises. It is wrong to try and score political points on issues of national security. The Modi Government too is expected to rise above petty party politics and involve and engage all political parties in addressing issues like Doklam. Collective wisdom, after all is the best wisdom!

Farmer markets: Supporting indigenous food systems for the future of food

By Bhogtoram Mawroh & Janak Preet Singh

Food, being the basic necessity of every person, is a unique entry point to introduce and discuss the dangers of eroding biodiversity and brings to fore the need to strengthen existing practices and revitalize those that are being forgotten. The process of dialoguing, showcasing, and exchanging local food production, consumption and preparation practices highlights and mainstreams the cultural knowledge and strengths of Indigenous peoples. One of the way by which this can be done is through Farmer's Markets that promote the Indigenous Food System especially ignored items like wild edibles. Such platforms are very important for the simple fact that what is often missing when discussing North East India and Meghalaya in particular is that these regions are not only a biodiversity hot spot but are very well endowed in terms of agrobiodiversity as well. This was communicated to NESFAS by a Czech researcher - Lukáš Pawera, ethno-botanist from the Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague who had come to Shillong to help design a participatory mapping exercise for documenting the agrobiodiversity of the State. After discussion with the NESFAS team a pilot field work was conducted in Khweng to test the validity of the proposed methodology.

Like many Bhoi villages Khweng is nestled between low lying hills and elongated alluvial valleys. The carpet of yellow in the valley alongside the green hills makes for a picturesque vista. Like the landscape surrounding it the village is mesmerizingly beautiful and the people highly resourceful. During the mini-FGD (Focus Group Discussion) the NESFAS team was able to list more than 140 food plants (crops and their varieties, wild food plants, spices included). From past experiences, NESFAS has been working with the village since 2013, it was very clear that there was, by conservative estimates, a minimum of 10% of plants which were missed. This is rectified when free listing is done with key informants, who in this case are custodian farmers. The final methodology will ensure that a complete profile can be created with all the relevant details covered.

Still the pilot survey brought out that the local landscape had high diversity of crops, particularly vegetables in the home gardens. More remarkable was the fact that there were many wild edible plants that were growing spontaneously just in front of the veranda of the households. Some of the wild edibles that were documented during this pilot survey were trykhang, jatalo, jamahek, jalympu, jawma, jarlut, jajew, jalising, jatlar, jajew (rob rob), jajew (ding), jarain, lapong murit, lapong nai, lungsiej, etc. Local people knew about their value and in fact judiciously took care of some varieties that grow along the embankments of the paddy fields. What was most revealing was when the Czech researcher informed those same varieties have almost disappeared from the paddy fields of Indonesia. This was based on his field work in this particular South-East Asian nation. Indiscriminate use of pesticides was the reason behind the loss of these wild edibles from the paddy fields of the Indonesian farmers. Here in Khweng though they were found to be in a very healthy state. Apart from the local varieties of rice and the wild edibles, local fishes are also caught by the people from the streams that flow across their paddy fields meaning that local people were able to consume at least three food categories (grains, vegetables and fish) from the paddy fields itself. The researcher was highly impressed by the agrobiodiversity and remarked that the village has great potential in terms of improving nutrition and food security.

However, when one asks the urban population about the agrobiodiversity and its various products, they are many times unaware about them. This is particularly so in the case of wild edibles. An important reason for it is the hesitancy of the local farmers to share information of such food plants. Like in many parts of the world, these are considered as "poor man's food". Such perceptions result in stigma being attached on its consumption. But such plants are important for many reasons. One of the most important attributes of such plants is their potential to act as climate resilient species. In the ongoing FAO study in Nongtraw, East Khasi Hills the community has informed the NESFAS research team that many of the wild edibles found in their landscape are highly climate change resilient, i.e., these plants can withstand multiple stresses. Recurrence of extreme events is the hallmark of climate change and agriculture is particularly vulnerable to such climate regimes. To agriculture's fate are connected those who depend directly (farmers, traders, manufacturers of food items) and indirectly (general public who are the consumers) on the activity, i.e., the whole of humanity. The domesticated plants of today were in fact the wild varieties of yesterday. Wild edibles as such have a very important role to play for present and future food security of the world.

Wild edibles can also help in improving nutrition. One of the ways to measure a household's nutrition intake is through Dietary Diversity Score. This is an inexpensive and quick method to assess household food consumption through a 24 hour recall. The responses are analysed by fitting the food items consumed within the ten food groups, viz., grains; white roots and tubers, and plantains; pulses (beans, peas and lentils); nuts and seeds; dairy; meat, poultry and fish; eggs; dark green leafy vegetables; other vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables; other vegetables and other fruits. A person should consume at least five food groups in order to be categorised as having a healthy diet. Wild edibles are an inexpensive and healthy substitute for increasing the food groups in the diet. But at the moment, these are what are referred as Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS).

In Bioversity publication 'Fighting Poverty, Hunger and Malnutrition with Neglected and Underutilized Species - Needs, Challenges and the Way Forward' Padulosi, Thompson and Rudebjer (2013) state that "Neglected and underutilized species are those to which little attention is paid or which are entirely ignored by agricultural researchers, plant breeders and policymakers. They are wild or semi-domesticated varieties and non-timber forest species that are not typically traded as commodities". NUS could be very central in strengthening food security, alleviating poverty, and increasing the resilience and sustainability of farming systems. This is because many NUS are adapted to marginal environments; many NUS are highly nutritious; some NUS have potential for development as novel consumer products to generate income for smallholder farmers and their communities; and NUS are typically embedded within local cultural traditions, such that their greater use could strengthen local identities and contribute to empower marginalized communities. NESFAS along with its partners are working together on improving nutrition and strengthening indigenous food systems in the State of Meghalaya. Under this initiative NUS can play a very important role.

It is with the appreciation of the role that wild edibles and other products from the indigenous food production system can play in improving nutrition and promoting livelihood, NESFAS (North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society) along with one of its partners, SSC (Social Service Centre), invited their farmer groups to Savio Hall on the 25th July 2018 to sell their produce directly to the consumers without any intermediary taking away their profit. Special emphasis was given on local crops that are a part of the indigenous food system thus promoting livelihood but with an emphasis on food security and nutrition. Many of these were wild edibles are unknown among urban consumers. The response from the consumers was very encouraging. Eight villages' viz., Mawmuthoh, Mawpyrshong, Rapleng, Jongksha, Lamsain, Laitdiengsai, and Nongtraw took part in this gathering with Khweng being one of them. They brought wild edibles like jali, jatira, jaut, tyrkhang, lungsiej, wang panai, etc. Another very important outcome of the initiative is also making consumers 'co-producers' - a term used to describe and highlight the power of the consumer to go beyond a passive role and take an active interest in those who produce our food, how they produce it and the problems they face in doing so. Consumers thus become an integral part of the production process. In this way both the producers and the consumers are empowered. This will be a regular affair with more farming communities poised to be invited in the future.

Bringing consumers (general public) and producers (farmers) together is just one initiative taken by NEFAS and its partners to promote and generate awareness on Indigenous Food Systems and its contribution towards food security, better nutrition, livelihood improvement, and healthy living. At the same time, this provides a platform for farmers to gain a fair price determined by the farmers themselves. This promotes their livelihood as well. NESFAS is fully aware that this is but only a small step. However that also means there is a scope for further growth. Drops don't make an ocean but what are oceans but millions of drops descending from heaven to cleanse the thirst of the land and the creatures that inhabit it. Without those individual drops there would be no ocean and no life.

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1984 Delhi riots make headlines again

People tired of the story dished out every now and again

By Aditya Aamir

Of course, the Congress was not involved. Rogues wearing the Congress name on their sleeves busted into tyre shops and tested them in an innovating manner, cast the tyre round a Sikh neck to see how the tyre burned, the Sikh burned. The testing method caught on and Congressi-looking men tried it on other Sikh necks.

Now when the son of the man, whose mother was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, denies there was a Congress involvement in the 1984 Sikh massacre, he cannot be harried endlessly, from London to Delhi. After all he was a kid at the time, not old enough to join a political party whereas today he is the Congress. Those days Congress was Indira and Indira was Congress! When Indira was assassinated the Congress died with her. October 31, 1984 the Congress was killed.

A new Congress was born much later after the government of the day committed itself to democracy by putting down a headless pogrom of massacre of Sikhs who just happened to be chosen to test tyres because their turbans made them stand out in a crowd.

A new party with the name Congress was born and it had nothing to do with the Indira Congress and Sikhs complaining today and holding Rahul Gandhi responsible is so out of sync with the current times when we have moved beyond massacres, leaving such killings to outfits like the ISIS, which like everybody with grey cells will know is a creation of joblessness and has nothing to do with a virulent form of Islam. If all that's written above sounds like a theatre of the absurd, please don't forget that there were and there are even now people not sound in the head who refer to the Sikh as the 'Surd'. Yep, the Sikh is the butt of many jokes and you do not have to look very far, just turn the pages and catch up with some Santa-Banta jokes.

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Santa and Banta jokes make for a good laugh at the expense of the Sikh and Rahul was doing just, telling a Santa-Banta joke to Englishmen who in any case wouldn't have caught on because the Brits are legendary tight-lips and clipped lips and stiff upper lips and if you give them the lip they will if not lash with the tongue keep the tongue firmly in the cheek.

Yeah, it's become an episodic habit to pull 1984 out every time a Gandhi takes to the stage and those with even a little intelligence will know that it's lack of intelligence that limits people to just the one question. '1984' is also a book written by an Englishman and that was a big hit. If the question was not thrown to Rahul, there would have been no way Sambit Patra would have got the chance to make a song and dance of it.

As any kid on the block, even the new one, will tell, Sambit Patra is the closest the BJP has come up with Santa-Banta but his jokes are stale, as old as 1984 when, if Sambit Patra is to be believed, he was yet to be born! Sambit Patra claims to be the youngest spokesperson making an ass of himself on television and he insists on it unlike Rahul Gandhi who refutes with the indignation worthy of a King.

Making an ass of yourself is an art and Sambit Patra is forever at making an ass of the Congress while unknowingly making an ass of himself. The million dollar question: Does he make an ass of the BJP when he's making ass of himself? Even a clown like Navjot Singh Sidhu will answer that without batting an eyelid, the answer is a 'No'.

That established ask, "How can the Congress alias Rahul Gandhi be blamed for Congressi-like apparitions testing rubber tyres cast around Sikh necks in 1984 after a big tree fell and shook the earth? If Sambit making an ass of himself does not mean the BJP making an ass of itself, then how can a few Congressi lookalikes making a killing in 1984 mean Rahul Gandhi and his Congress made a killing when Rahul was of an age that didn't know the tree from the wood.

It is time the Sikh got sick of 1984 and the BJP stopped jumping with alacrity at the mention of 1984. Haven't whispers been heard of RSS-types too testing tyres that year? If anybody should be held responsible for the pogrom of 1984, it is the tyre-makers of that time. People had never seen a big tree fall and the kind of fall it would make.

Today, people are tired of the same old tyre rolled out every five years. Will people just roll on and move on to other trying matters like the homegrown Muslim Brotherhood who will never have Mecca in their itinerary because they don't say 'Inshallah' when in doubt, they are so used to Jai Sri Ram?

Didn't a big tree fall when Ravana abducted Sita and wasn't Rama's reaction much the same, a general massacre of Lankans who were barred from Ashok Vatika and but for Hanuman would have never heard of Sita or Rama or Hanuman, now a celebrated cartoon character? Move on folks, 1984 will never come again, not after twice making headlines! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Why pay toll tax?

Editor,

Every time we take the Shillong Guwahati route we happily shell out the designated toll fees. In return we expect the drive to be hassle free and the road in tip top shape.

But now what we see is that every time there is a heavy downpour, the roads get flooded especially in the Nongpoh and Jorabad sections and innumerable landslides all across the route. This indicates that the NHAI Engineers were either incompetent or were criminally negligent.

Any layman could have foreseen the landslides seeing how the steep angle of the slopes were cut. Also that the gradients are non-existent if at all, can be proven by the volume of water on the road surfaces on a rainy day and while driving a car at the turns. This is another factor for the increasing number of mishaps especially at the bends. Proper drainage has never been thought through hence floods occur easily because of this simple fact. Until and unless these faults are rectified the Government should step in and stop the collection of toll at the gates.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Tridib Kakoty
Animal Concern
Shillong -14

Unrealistic ultimatum

Editor,

Apropos the Garo Hills State Movement Committee's (GHSMC) ultimatum to Meghalaya Government for immediate repair of different roads in South Garo Hills District (ST August 27, 2018) I wish to state that giving just one week's time for the MDA Government to react to the ultimatum is too short a time. Yes the GHSMC and the Mothers' Union of South Garo Hills has raised a very important issue which ought to be immediately attended to. I personally have traveled to many parts of South Garo Hills and I found that this District is perhaps the richest in natural resources but the most neglected of all the Districts by various governments of Meghalaya. If you want to see and experience first hand the rich bounty of nature, please go to South Garo Hills and you will never regret.

We all know that roads are the lifeline and the backbone of development. However, the roads in South Garo Hills are horrible. Yes, as mentioned by the above Organisations the roads in the District especially from Nengkhra-Nangalbibra-Baghmara, Moheskola-Mahadeo-Baghmara, Baghmara-Mindikgre, Baghmara-Rongsu Asim, Baghmara-Sibbari-Chokpot-Dalu, Karukol-Nengkong, Dalangre-Eman Asakgre and Deku-Kherapara need immediate widening, metalling and blacktopping because they are in a dilapidated condition. I do not know how vehicles can ply on these roads and I can very well imagine the hardships faced by the people of that region. But can the Meghalaya Government do justice to these roads because thousands of crores will be required. What I have learnt is that the Road from Baghmara to Moheskhola connecting to Ranikor-Nongjri-Moheskola and the portion of the NH-62 from Nengkhra- Nangalbibra-Baghmara-Sibbari-Chokpot-Dalu are already in the pipeline to be undertaken by various Companies to be financed by the Ministry of Surface Transport and Highways but I wonder why the delay. I urge the MDA Government led by the young and dynamic Chief Minister to take up the demand on topmost priority.

I also request the MDA Government to accord topmost priority to the proposed Natonal Highways from Nongstoin-Rambrai-Kyrshai to reach Chaygoan, Nongstoin-Rangblang-Wahkaji-Phlangdiloin-Ranikor, Nongstoin-Maweit-Kulang-Nongjri and Riangdo-Athiabari-Hahim to join the Hahim-Boko road. In fact these road links were already in the pipeline during earlier governments and were to be undertaken by various construction companies and financed by MoRTH. Again, I don't know the reasons for the delay in constructing the roads. I again urge Conrad Sangma, the CM, to be up and doing by moving the central Minister of MoRTH to see that these roads see the light of day as they are already in the pipeline.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

"No democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of minorities."

--- Norman Mailer

The Shillong Times

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MDA scores: Congress down

NPP President, Conrad Sangma's win was predictable because the Garo people are astute voters. That the Chief Ministerial candidate won with a thumping majority by securing 8421 votes over his nearest rival from the Congress, is a thumbs up for Conrad Sangma and the NPP. Three of Conrad's rival candidates from South Tura even lost their security deposits. This also shows Conrad Sangma's personal credibility as much as it is also a vote for the MDA Government that he leads. The Ranikor result on the other hand was a setback for the NPP collectively and a personal loss for the former Congress MLA and now NPP candidate, Martin Danggo. With this election Danggo ends his five-year journey as MLA from Ranikor. It is this over-confidence perhaps that also made an over-ambitious Danggo resign his seat; change his party and contest from the NPP. There is a limit beyond which the electorate will not tolerate such political shenanigans. The 27 year old Pius Marwein who lost the February elections by a slim margin of 400 votes but his tenacity won in the long run.

While the Congress and NPP are presently both at 20 seats each, the MDA seems set for a full term since the coalition partners are unlikely to rock the boat and team up with the Congress Party who they have all fought against in the last elections. However, a premature assertion by the UDP, that their newest trophy Pius Marwein be given a cabinet berth, does not bode well for the coalition. This is more like a bombastic claim by a party with just 8 candidates in a House of 60. Here comes the maturity of the UDP President, Donkupar Roy who remained calm and never spoke a word that was out of place even after this phenomenal win. Now that Conrad Sangma has established himself as an elected CM he can begin to take the MDA on a new trajectory of planned progress and a new economic growth path. Already the MDA has been trying to bring out policies on key areas such as Education but they need to do that for Health, Tourism, Mining, Agriculture and Horticulture too. Without a road-map and goal-setting the Government cannot set benchmarks for itself and the public too would find it difficult to assess the achievements of the Government at the end of its term. It is this perhaps that has made previous governments shun the policy-making exercise. The MDA can now hit the ground running.

Outrageous responses to Kerela calamity

By Albert Thyrniang

As the torrential rain poured incessantly, rivers began to flow above danger levels, dams and reservoirs were filled to the brim and had to be opened, the worst floods in more than a hundred years had occurred and millions were stranded. Vehicles were carried away like toys, homes submerged and swept away, hills and mountains gave way, huge landslides brought downs buildings burying hundreds alive. More than 300 loss their lives; lakhs were forced to take shelter in relief camps. Such was the magnitude of the calamity. The total loss is estimated at more than 20,000 crores. As the catastrophe was unfolding before our very eyes through television, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, etc hate messages of all sorts also flooded the social media platforms.

Some people know the exact causes of the flood. One reason they point out is women's entry in Sabrimala Temple. It may be reminded that women had demanded entry into Kerala's Sabarimala temple and the matter reached the Supreme Court. Recently the Apex Court reserved its verdict on the petitions praying for entry of menstruating women into the ancient temple dedicated to lord Ayyappan and located in Palakkad district of Kerala. Some think lord Ayyappa is angry with the people of Kerala and sent the rain and the floods as punishment for demanding entry of women into the well known pilgrimage centre located on a hilltop at an altitude of 1260 m.

This absurd and bizarre explanation is not limited to ordinary social media users. Unfortunately educated individuals like S Gurumurthy, an RSS ideologue, who was recently appointed to the board of the Reserve Bank of India, subscribes to this ridiculous view. "Supreme court judges may like to see if there is any connection between the case (floods) and what is happening in Sabarimala. Even if there is one in a million chance of a link people would not like the case decided against Ayyappan," he thundered in his tweet. This sexist commentary is shameful and condemnable.

The second cause, according to hate mongers and fanatics, is beef eating. Beef consumption in Kerala is legendary and an intrinsic part of the Kerala identity. Despite the 55% Hindu population in the state, beef is served at home, hotels, restaurants and in roadside shops. They enjoy beef prepared deliciously with coconut, curry leaves, cinnamon, cloves, coriander powder and roasted chilly. No wonder the BBC in one of its reports in 2016 called 'Kerala a state obsessed with beef fry'. Hindus, Muslims and Christians can be seen sitting at one table enjoying over a plate of beef fry and parantha transcending all differences of caste and class. This has led to insensitive social media users to hatefully declare that the people of Kerela deserve this harsh punishment for eating the flesh of the mother cow. Bigotry and hate were spread to justify that Malayalis faced God's wrath because they eat beef and warned them to stop the age old food habit or else future calamities will re-occur.

The BJP and other Hindutva outfits have been waging a war against beef consumption and many states have imposed a ban on cow slaughter but Kerala has been vehemently opposing it. Therefore, sick minded dogmatists even celebrate at the suffering of the flood-hit people of the Southern state. This is appalling to say the least.

Natural disasters happen all over the world. No country escapes natural disasters. No unscientific causes should be attributed to any calamity. In recent memory India was a victim of terrible disasters. The 1999 Odisha cyclone caused destruction amounting to US$4.44 billion, the 2001 Gujarat earthquake of 7.7 magnitude killed more than 20,000 people, the 2013 Odisha cyclone incurred a loss of about Rs 42.4 billion, the 2004 deadly tsunami in the Indian Ocean killed over 227,898 people in 14 countries (including India) and the 2015 Tamil Nadu floods left more than 500 people dead are mentioned here. If the Kerala floods are attributed to gods' anger, what caused the above mentioned horrific calamities? Natural causes are the answers. No one likes attributing religious reasons for disasters. The realm of God or religion is neither visible nor verifiable and therefore, attributing them as causes for the misfortune of others is abominable.

Appeals for help for relief and rebuilding, met heart rendering responses of solidarity and empathy from all corners. But there are also outrageous and ugly responses from people who instead appealed against financial or other form of assistance for the 'accursed people of Kerala'.

A group of them condemned that the people of Kerala need no help because they are Christians and Muslims. Almost half of the population of Kerala are non-Hindus. Therefore, for them they can suffer. No donation or contribution should be sent to them. These are more than stupid and insensitive comments. The floods did not discriminate against Hindus or Muslims or Christians. All were affected as water doesn't recognize religion. The population of Kerala suffered and is suffering. Shockingly people in the social media asked viewers not to make donation to Kerala because of the large Christians and Muslims population or even if they do, donate to organisations that exclusively help Hindus. Others warned that funds will be used to convert Hindus to Christianity or Islam.

Another set of hard hearted people campaigned for non-assistance because Keralites are 'naxals'. A person who identifies himself as a faculty at Art of Living tweeted, "Don't donate money as it will not be used for relief work. It will be used against our country. It will be given for naxals and JNU 'thugs'". Another person wrote, "Kerala and JK are anti-national states. No need fund." These sort of responses to a natural tragedy are shocking in the 21st century. Humanity and solidarity is the only concern at this very challenging time for the people of Kerala and no other consideration should cross our mind.

As for the causes, instead of attributing the floods to imaginary and illusionary reasons a scientific analysis is required. According to environmentalists the whole situation is aggravated by careless human activities like extensive quarrying, mushrooming of high-rising structures, deforestation and poor policy decisions. The devastation in "God's Own Country" might have been a 'man-made disaster'. According to scientists, the nature's fury that wreaked havoc was due to unhindered human interference with nature.

After the Chennai floods of 2015, the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India that was tabled in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, stated that 2015 floods was a "man-made disaster". Apparently no lesson was learned. Another report was submitted in 2011 by experts headed by Madhav Gadgil, an ecologist and founder of the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, recommended protecting the ecologically-fragile Western Ghats, including Kerala. Therefore, environmental scientists like VS Vijayan, an expert on Western Ghats, said, "Kerala is going through a man-made calamity. The impact should have been limited if the Gadgil committee report, aimed at protecting ecologically-fragile mountain ranges, was implemented."

Reports say that the Gadgil Committee, also known as Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel had made specific recommendations like stopping mining and quarrying in specific areas to avoid potential disasters. It also recommended restrictions on deforestation and unhindered use of land for construction. The committee had proposed that 140,000 kilometres of the Western Ghats be classified into three zones according to the need for the ecological protection of the areas. The Kerala government rejected the committee report and never adopted any of its recommendations. Therefore, environmentalists say that some of the regions which bore the brunt of the Kerala flood fury was due to the total disregard for the environment.

Several other environmentalists are now blaming the unabated quarrying, mushrooming of high-rise buildings as part of tourism promotion and illegal forest land acquisition by private enterprises as the main causes for the catastrophe. Hence, it makes sense to say that the Kerala calamity was also man-made. The warnings were written on the wall. Had they been paid heed to, the scale of the destruction would have been mitigated.

The focus now is on the aftermath of the 2018 calamity. Recovery will be long. Rebuilding will be hard and challenging. The loss ravaged by this natural or man-made calamity is humongous. Obviously Kerala needs help. Individual or organisational donation should be encouraged and welcomed. Even if one wishes not to contribute, it is fine but asking others not to send assistance because they don't like the people of Kerala is despicable. It is against humanity.

Arrest of rights activists smacks of unofficial emergency

Pune police break all norms to pursue vindictive agenda

By Raman Swamy

Varavara Rao is 77 years old – he is a well-known Telugu poet, college principal and human rights activist - his house in Hyderabad was raided on Tuesday morning. The reason, according to the police, is that he is suspected of plotting to assassinate Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Sudha Bharadwaj is a lawyer specializing in tribal welfare cases - an engineering graduate from IIT Kanpur, she renounced American citizenship despite being born in Massachusetts and has spent the last 30 years fighting against MNC mining companies usurping adivasi land in Chhattisgarh. She was arrested from her Faridabad residence at dawn on Tuesday. Reason? She too was suspected of being in the plot to kill the Prime Minister.

Gautam Navlakha is a well-known Delhi-based journalist, Penguin author, human rights campaigner and regular contributor to the Economic and Political Weekly. He too was raided at 6 a.m. on Tuesday and had all his books, papers and electronic equipment seized. The reason - suspicion of being a dreaded "urban terrorist" with links to the Modi assassination plot.

Eighty-three year old Father Stan Swamy also received the knock on the door of his Ranchi residence on Tuesday morning with police claiming to have "confidential information" of his involvement in the conspiracy to kill -- (yes, you got it) the Prime Minister of India. Father Swamy has been a lifelong tribal rights crusader in Jharkhand and is a Christian priest which, in the eyes of the government, proves his guilt.

The poet in Hyderabad, the lawyer in Faridabad, the journalist in New Delhi and the priest in Ranchi were not the only ones to be raided and detained on the fateful morning of August 28. There were many others - it takes several thinking minds to devise a devious Sriperumbadur-style plot to take down a Prime Minister.

In Mumbai, the home of activist Vernon Gonsalves and his lawyer wife Susan Abraham, was also raided at around 6 am. Lawyer Arun Ferreira also received a similar police visit.

In Hyderabad, the police turned up at the residences of Varavara Rao's two daughters, Pavana and Anala, and their husbands Satyanarayana, a college professor, and Kurmanath, a journalist, Raids were also simultaneously conducted at the homes of others like Kranti Tekula and Naseem, both suspected of being in the ring of conspirators.

In Goa, the target was another suspected "urban guerilla" – award-winning writer and management guru Anand Teltumbde.

Professor Teltumbde, incidentally, holds a post-graduate diploma in management from IIM Ahmadabad and a mechanical engineering degree from Nagpur's prestigious Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology.

That apart, he has also been an Executive Director of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd and the CEO of Petronet India Ltd and handled assignments in Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and China. In fact, he was a member of the study group on Petroleum Deregulation in 1995 and worked on several government nd corporate committees.

A management teacher at the Goa Institute of Management, Prof. Anand Teltumbde has also taught post-graduates and doctoral students at various other management institutes and has even been a Ph D examiner. He has published more than 20 research papers in reputed international journals in the areas like Business Strategy, Production Research, Ergonomics and Information Technology.

He is the recipient of awards and recognitions for his social work too - Ambedkar Centenary Award (UK), Ram Manohar Lohia Centenary Award, Vikas Ratna and Maharashtra Foundation (USA). In 2014, the Karnataka State University conferred on him an honorary doctorate.

Considered a noted scholar on people movements and Dalit causes, he has authored several books and contributed articles in magazines like Outlook India, Seminar, Frontier and Economic & Political Weekly (in which he writes a regular column 'Margin Speak').

All said and done, it was a glorious red-letter day in the history of law and order in India under BJP-RSS rule. A nefarious attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister has been nipped in the bud – most probably nipped even before any of the alleged co=conspirators could even plant the seeds of their evil thoughts.

The simultaneous surgical operation across the country was well-coordinated and precise. The suspected ring leaders have been nabbed and neutralized in Mumbai, Delhi, Ranchi, Goa and Hyderabad - much before they could have turned from being poets, writers, journalists, lawyers and management gurus into deadly Urban Terrorists.

This was second swoop on the murderous gang members who have spent their whole life planning to physically eliminate Narendra Modi. The first surgical strike was on June 6 – when in another coordinated operation the police had arrested Professor Shoma Sen in Nagpur, Rona Wilson from Delhi, Sudhir Dhawale in Mumbai and many oothers including Surendra Gadling and Mahesh Raut.

The raids and arrests of teachers, thinkers and human rights crusaders have collectively achieved the main objectives – to protect the Prime Minister and also to deflect attention away from the investigation of cases against Hindutva leaders Milind Ekbote and Sambhaji Bhide, who have been accused of provoking the violence in Bhima Koregaon in January.

No hard evidence was produced, there was no warrant, but the human right lawyers and the activists who defended the defenceless adivasis, have been nabbed by the police on the basis of "clues". It is now unofficial emergency in the last year of Modi-Shah rule.

Ever since the Bhima Koregoan violence against Dalits, the Maharashtra Police and the central investigating agencies have faced with an embarrassing dilemma - how not to pursue the probe against the real culprits? Now that matter has been put to rest. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

District status for Sohra

Editor,

Now that the Committee has been formed for the demand for District status for Sohra, upgrading it from a Sub-Division, it is fervently hoped that the birthplace of legends like Rabon Singh Kharsuka, Radhon Singh Berry Kharwanlang, Soso Tham, JJM Nicholls Roy, and GG Swell, to name a few, and the land of ka Nohkalikai, Daiñthlen, Nohsngithiang, Khoh Ramhah and Kynrem, will soon regain its pride of place. History is sometimes brutal and merciless snatching away monuments of glory even from the deepest earth. But it also repeats itself most indifferently and in its cycle of reinvention the depths crack and open up for a new and more glorious beginning to emerge. Even the latest geological age of the planet, the Meghalayan Age, gets its name from a cave in Mawmluh under Sohra Sub-Division.

It goes without saying that the ground work prepared and strategised by the said Committee should get due support and endorsement from the local representatives. One representative is known to have been very vocal, albeit in closed circles, about his undying dream of making Sohra a District. Should he be successful, even if he hangs his boots in 2023, his name will be forever engraved in the hearts of the people of Sohra Sub-Division. However, there is one sobering thought. Shall the name Sohra be lost for/ to generations to come in the absurd craze of naming all our Districts in the bland and totally unimaginative passion for directions? In my humble opinion, notwithstanding the topography, it is high time we do away with naming our Districts with this undue obeisance and homage to the compass. Just try this: South East Khasi Hills District for Sohra? Surely the achievement will be always overshadowed by a historic blunder. All parties concerned should reflect more deeply on this.

Yours etc.
Banlam K Lyngdoh
Mawmluh

Equitable distribution of property

Editor,

The ST had published letters concerning equitable distribution of properties in Khasi families. In fact a lot of campaigns have been organised by Michael Syiem on the subject by appealing the Khasi parents and the Khasi society at large to ensure equitable distribution of property among children and not to entrust the entire self-acquired and ancestral properties to only the youngest daughter of the family as done by predecessors. I am in total agreement with him on this issue. However, according to my experience and observations, I must clearly state here, that for quite a long time this practice of entrusting the entire property of the family to the youngest daughter (Ka Khatduh) is not a common practice. Khasi families have changed tremendously and have been distributing whatever property and wealth they have among the children, especially among the daughters based on love, wisdom, quantum and discretion and there is no partiality as such, except in very rare cases. This is the case in both urban and rural areas.

Today, the population of the Khasis have multiplied and majority of the Khasi families, both in urban, sub-urban and rural areas are either middle class or poor and do not have property to distribute among the children. In fact, majority of Khasi families are poor and are landless in both urban and rural areas. They may have some savings in banks by way of little cash but again in many cases the cash is not sufficient to distribute among the children when they move out of the families to establish a new home. On the contrary there are also quite a number of Khasi families, about 15 to 20 per cent, which are quite rich having a lot of movable and immovable properties and also crores of rupees both in their safe custody and in banks. They too distribute their wealth among the children. The time has changed so also the families' treatment towards their children.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Legalise cattle trade

Editor,

Off and on there have been reports of cattle trade happening across the international border with neighbouring Bangladesh albeit in an illegal way. This ' trade' has been there since time immemorial even before attainment of our statehood and has served as an alternative source of income and livelihood to those residing along the international border. This trade has been highlighted by the Border Security Force as an ' acute' problem which poses great challenges at various levels. The spike of beef sales is equally attributed to this ' illegal trade ' that tilts the balance between demand and supply for consumers and sellers on both sides. Therefore, to bring about some system of economic equality and balance, the state government should table a resolution to legalize the cattle trade across the international border with Bangladesh so that it remains within the control of the law, which until now it is an illegal business and the state continues to endure the loss of revenue due to many factors. Once the trade is legalised everyone interested in the cattle business and its allied activities will automatically gain and it will create employment for the people around the area. However, as long as this illegal business continues, the major share of this trade goes into the pockets of a few and results in the loss to others who may want to venture into the trade in a legal and systematic way.

Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong:

"Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few."

--- Walter Gropius

The Shillong Times

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A vote for EVMs

A basic human tendency is to see red where there's none. The outcry of a section of political parties against the use of electronic voting machines or EVMs is exactly that. A demand is gaining ground that the nation should revert to ballot papers and avoid the use of EVMs in future elections. Prima facie, this is like taking a giant leap backwards from a level the country has painstakingly reached. Curiously, this chorus from some political parties has come up in the backdrop of their having lost some key assembly polls in recent times. The blame is on the EVMs. A word in defence of the EVMs does not mean they are tamper-proof. When technicalities are involved, possibilities of tampering cannot be ruled out. While basing one's argument on this premise, it is also important that an attempt is made to prove that EVMs are unreliable. Despite repeated offers from the Election Commission, no political party or individual could so far demonstrate that EVMs can be tampered with. As long as this is not done, no strong argument can be advanced against the electronic system of voting.

To argue for a return to the highly expensive ballot paper mode is also to advocate an archaic system. Notably, the old system too was not tamper-proof, as had been demonstrated time and again in the past. In states like Bihar, it was not uncommon to find cases of massive fraud in the polling processes in areas where thugs and powerful vested interests called all the shots. EVMs might or might not change such a scenario but a combination of EVMs and CCTVs could possibly create a better scenario. Technology is so advanced today that the results from EVMs can be released a minute after the close of the voting. If not the present, the future holds such a promise.An argument in favour of EVMs is the manner in which the Gujarat elections played out. The Opposition Congress party fought neck-and-neck till the last stage of the counting, and yielded ground to the ruling BJP there by a whisker. Had there been a possibility of tampering of EVMs by the ruling Govt - in this case the BJP, the results would have been different, also since the results there were a matter of personal prestige for Prime Minister, Modi. Punjab went the Congress way via EVMs; so did the Congress-JDU in Karnataka. Those arguing against EVMs therefore should conclusively demonstrate the flaws if any in the system. Technology, after all, is no one's exclusivepreserve.

Politics of Fear and why fear-mongering works

By Patricia Mukhim

Machiavelli once said, "If you cannot rule through love - do so with fear." Indeed, fear is an old and brilliant tactic to get people to bend to your will. But there are many different types of fear you can instil in people to help you strike fear in others. Some people strike fear with their physical build and their muscles. They are easier to tackle than the ones that use psychological methods to manipulate our minds and our ability to think and judge coherently. Politicians across all parties and persuasions have understood the power of fear-mongering. First they create doubts and uncertainties. They profess to care for the people they wish to manipulate. They will even shed tears to convince people that they are genuinely concerned. Politicians have studied the situation so well they know exactly what our insecurities are. In Meghalaya a sure-shot winner is to paint the picture of the enemy as someone who is an outsider (meaning a non-Khasi but more specifically a non-tribal). This "outsider" is waiting to pounce on our land, our women, our businesses, our minerals, our forests, our markets, and is also spreading HIV-AIDS, even while we watch in shock and horror at this act of avaricious exploitation. And yes, we are so simple that there is nothing we can do to protect ourselves and our economic resources. Hence we need leaders to protect us! They are the subconscious anchors we think we need and without whom we are doomed.

A politician (self-appointed leader) who uses fear as a tactic of control usually turns the majority against one person or persons who challenge his authority. So whoever he dislikes and cannot control also becomes the enemy/ enemies of those whose minds the politician cleverly manipulates. Indirectly or passive aggressively such a leader tells the people whose emotions he controls that they should side with him more often or risk facing social alienation and isolation. This is a tool to bend others to his will. And people in general are so afraid of social isolation that they have to simply agree with the leader. That's actually how popularity is gained.

While some of these imagined fears are of our own making such as the fear of losing out if we have to compete with the non-tribal for he/she is ingenious (which means we have already given up competing with this person because we have painted the image of failure in our minds). There are many such narratives created by those in positions of power. Individuals looking to take advantage of, and manipulate others, have long realized the power of fear. When one is gripped by fear of a threat, real or imagined, their rational and higher cognitive capacities shut down, making them easier to manipulate, particularly if that saviour promises safety from the threat.

It was Edmund Burke who said, "No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear does." Oppressive governments often maintain their grip on a nation by continually invoking fear, and then proceeding to claim that only they, the ruling powers, have the means and ability to protect the population from such a threat: HL Mencken once wrote, *"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary." Let me also quote John Adams,* one of the founding fathers of America to buttress my arguments. Adams said, *"Fear is the foundation of most governments".*

While there are numerous tactics and strategies that have developed over the centuries to effectively exploit the public through fear, two of the more powerful and efficient ones are the use of false flags, - such as putting up black flags as the Display Picture (DP) on social media (Facebook, WhatsApp etc) and the invention of and implementation of propaganda via repetition. The flag is such a copycat action that you only have to have some imagined crises to see such flags as DPs on the Facebook accounts of those who are brainwashed to do so and who are unlikely to question the reason/s why they do what they do. This is actually a covert operation started by one agent provocateur (generally a person with a huge political appetite) which is designed to deceive in such a way that the operations appear as though they are being carried out by entities and groups that think alike and not by those who actually planned and executed them. In his book, 'Feardom,' Conor Boyack provides a nice explanation on the effectiveness of false flags for those looking to institute social, political and psychological control.

The more I read and analyse the events of recent times the more I am convinced that hard core politicians who are now unsure of returning to power and wannabe politicians who wish to catapult to power both use these fear-mongering tactics. They detest people who question and conveniently term them as 'enemies.' In our own case anyone who dissents, questions, seeks explanations is termed as, "nongshet kylla" (traitor). The traitor then becomes a soft target of abuse on social media and in public meetings where people are never allowed to raise questions. To the rational mind it's difficult to comprehend how people are so easily misled by such propaganda but research on human cognition and the psychology of risk perception offers several explanations for why these campaigns work.

Research in human cognition has established that most of what the brain does that turns into our judgments and behaviours happens subconsciously and is based as much as or more on emotion and instinct than on cold hard logic. And the primary instinct is that of survival. The brain's chief purpose, from the moment we get out of bed in the morning, is to get us safely to bed at night, not to get good grades or win Nobel prizes, say David Ropeik in BigThink.

Hence we humans are hardwired to constantly be on the lookout for signs of danger. And cognition research has found that we are quick to judge those signs. We don't take the time to get all the facts and think things through. We use a number of mental shortcuts to rapidly turn a few initial hints into snap judgments about whether something feels risky. One of those shortcuts is called "the availability heuristic." The more available something is to our consciousness - the more aware of it we are - the more emotional weight it is likely to carry.

Going to social media sites created by different groups all driven by paranoia and jingoism one sees one and only one fear – that the Khasi race would soon be obliterated from this land and be taken over by the "outsider" or by those who collude with that outsider. It's almost as if there is a deliberate design to paint women as the betrayer; but then not all women are put in that category. Some who are considered 'pure Khasi' in their genealogy because their parents are seemingly Khasi and they have married Khasi men, are embraced and enlisted to fight the good fight for that cause which is the FEAR that we would be reduced to a dangerous minority in Meghalaya – our only hearth and home. If a reputed social anthropologist were to be asked to research on why some races become endangered they might give us completely different reasons for why that happens. But then why rely on research and empirical evidence? Once research challenges assumptions, the ability to create fear will dissipate, then where will our fear-mongering politicians hide?

While it is a fact that a large majority of Khasi people today are becoming poorer (Socio-economic caste census 2011) a few have also become affluent; that this majority finds it increasingly difficult to pay their bills and to find a decent livelihood is a stark reality. It becomes even starker when someone in the family falls ill. That's when families can go bankrupt, insurance notwithstanding. There is amongst many a sense of powerlessness. One comes to grips with that that feeling especially when talking to people in the slums of Shillong and in some of the poorer villages. And one of the responses to that threatening sense of powerlessness is to turn to the tribe. Humans are social animals. We instinctively depend on each other for safety and protection. The more threatened we feel as individuals, the more we look to our tribe to provide a sense of power and control that we have in a group but lack as individuals. And one of the ways we turn to our tribe for protection is by adopting and espousing the tribe's beliefs, so the others in the tribe consider us as members in good standing.

That's why many don't wish to take a stand and be isolated. Right or wrong they stand with the current 'tribal' viewpoint even if in their solitary moments they feel that the ideals espoused by the tribe leader might have adverse consequences in the long run. Indeed, we are caught in a trap of fear. And knee-jerk reaction to this fear is taking away our potential to move towards the path of positive progress because politicians don't want us to be an empowered citizenry. Period!

Four State Elections and two political parties

December-January to reveal country's political direction

By Gyan Pathak

In the midst of the BJP's ridiculing Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi and his becoming stronger day by day, one thing is obvious - greater the ridicule, stronger he becomes. Ridicule has become BJP's weakest weapon against Rahul, while the Congress president is increasingly resorting to stronger political weapons against the policies and decisions of the Modi government.

We have seen its effect even during the Gujarat and Karnataka elections. The gap that was in 2014 between the political support of Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi has all along been reducing. The sinking support base of Modi-Shah duo and increasing political clout of Rahul would be put to test within three months when the four states would face Vidhan Sabha elections, where no other political party is a factor. It would be Modi vs Rahul, and BJP vs INC.

The terms of the legislative assemblies of four states - Mizoram, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh - will expire in December and January. The new government in Mizoram must be in place by December 18 this year. In Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan the dates are January 5, January 7, and January 20 respectively next year.

The elections are seen as the semi-final contest for the general election to the Lok Sabha, the term of which will expire on May 26, 2019. The state assembly elections have become important for various reasons, one of which is that barring Mizoram, all the three states are ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party. Mizoram is ruled by Indian National Congress. The results thus will provide an insight into the political prospect of the INC and the BJP. More so because both parties are pitted against each other in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. People will come to know which party is becoming stronger, and which is becoming weaker. As for Mizoram, there is no political base for the BJP and, therefore, it is dependent on the performance of its ally.

Anti-incumbency is strongly felt in all the states going for elections. On the one hand, the ruling INC in Mizoram will suffer a 'single anti-incumbency', BJP will have to undergo 'double incumbency' on account of ruling Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan along with ruling at the Centre for the last four and a half years. All the three states have also been witnessing agrarian unrest and demonstrations against the ruling governments for some time now along with unemployed youths who are showing a tendency to be restive against the omissions and commissions of the government at the Centre and the states. Communalism is stronger than casteism in all the four states, on which the BJP is banking upon. They believe that polarization on the line of castes among the Hindus can be upset only by polarization on the line of communalism.

In Mizoram, Lal Thanhawla of the INC has been ruling the state for two terms. In the decade before, Zoramthanga of Mizo National Front (MNF) was the chief minister. In the decade before the MNF rule, the INC was ruling the state. This alternating pattern has given hope to the BJP that INC could be ousted this time if they work together with MNF, which has declared several times in the recent months that they will not have any pre-poll alliance with the BJP. It is disheartening for the BJP which has committed itself to see a 'Congress-free India'. The recent claim of BJP president Amit Shah of 'sweeping northeast polls' is, therefore, not supported by the ground realities.

Chhattisgarh, after its formation as a separate state in November 2000, was ruled by Ajit Jogi of the Indian National Congress, for only three years upto December 2003. Since then Raman Singh of the BJP is ruling. He will be completing his third term, and most likely will be the chief ministerial candidate seeking re-election for the fourth term. The state is politically divided between the two parties - INC and the Congress. The INC has been suffering due to lack of a formidable leadership for a long time, especially after its main leaders were killed in a naxal attack in 2013. Altogether 27 INC leaders were killed and several others succumbed to injuries. However, in the last five years, the state Congress has become stronger, first due to the efforts of the new leadership of the state, and secondly due to the ever increasing anti-incumbency. The tribal dominated Chhattisgarh has been under the grip of naxalites for a long time, and it has also been reported that many politicians have close connections with them, and they bargain their support during elections.

Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the incumbent chief minister in Madhya Pradesh, has been ruling the state since 2005. He would be seeking re-election as the BJP's chief ministerial candidate for the third term, if the party leadership decides to field him again. This is the talk of the state because there is a strong group in the state BJP batting against him. They feel that the BJP may lose in the elections if he is fielded again as chief ministerial candidate. This group has close relationships with Modi-Shah duo at the centre. They have been telling the central BJP leadership that the only way out of the 'strong anti-incumbency' is to replace Chouhan with some other leader. The then chief minister Uma Bharati was replaced by Babu Lal Gaur in August 2004 in less than a year. Babu Lal Gaur was then replaced by the present chief minister in November 2005 after the BJP won the state's assembly election. The state has traditionally been INC's fort which it lost to the BJP after a decade of its rule under the chief ministership of Digvijay Singh between 1993 and 2003. The major cause of INC's defeat was the rise of Hindutva in the state and the severe infighting in the Congress Party. Both the factors have now somewhat weakened, giving hope to the INC to snatch the reign of the state from the BJP.

Rajasthan is most likely to witness a fierce battle between the INC and the BJP. Both the parties have considerable support base of their own. Since 1993, both the parties are ruling the state alternately. The BJP came to power for the first time in the state after the rise of Hindutva forces in the 1990 by snatching the reign traditionally held by the INC. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat became the first chief minister of the BJP. The state came under President's rule between December 1992 and December 1993, ie after the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. He again became chief minister in 1993 for one term. INC came to power in 1998, BJP in 2003, INC in 2008, and BJP in 2013. If this alternating patter of the people's preference is continued, the INC may be the next winner. The incumbent chief minister will have sleepless nights ahead because of the prospect of losing, not only on this alternating preference, but also the double incumbency, infighting, agrarian unrest, and the ire of the disillusioned youth on account of ever rising unemployment. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Informative article

Editor,

The article, "How many types of Khasis are there" by Bhogtoram Mawroh (ST Aug 25, 2018) was informative and educative as well. My congratulations to him and I request him to continue writing more such articles in this newspaper and other print media. In paragraph eleven of the article Mawroh has mentioned seven sub-tribes (types) of Khasis- the Pnar, the War, the Khynriam, the Bhoi, the Maram, the Lyngngam and the Diko according to their geographical settlements. However, according to my knowledge and experience and after verification from several sources I came to know that the Diko are not Khasis. In fact they are Garos and their geographical settlement is different, their language and customary practices are also quite different. I request him and the readers to take note of this.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein
Via email

WKH gets step-motherly treatment

Editor,

Apropos to the report, "HYC asks PWD to repair West Khasi Hills road"(ST August 30, 2018) as a son of the soil I would like to affirm and reiterate this truth. Prior to the Assembly elections this writer has called on voters to exercise their franchise conscientiously. For better or for worse they have done that. A new figure rose to the throne. There was great anticipated hope. There was a sigh of relief. However, our joys are slowly turning into bitter pills. I hope it will not choke us to death. The reality remains the same. The sun has not risen even after six months. Our worst plight are the dilapidated and pathetic road conditions everywhere we turn. Where is the PWD? Where are our leaders? It appears that the various government departments and our leaders do not care at all about us. Enough is enough. We cannot be blind and remain dumb forever. I fear that we might have a French Revolution in West Khasi Hills very soon if this step-motherly treatment continues.

Yours etc.,
Gervasius Nongkseh
Jaidoh, West Khasi Hills

Should Govt forget its employees

Editor,

Meghalaya faces multiple problems ranging from unemployment to financial crunch which the Chief Minister recently admitted in a candid interview with this newspaper. Then comes the meaningless Lineage Bill which degrades the dignity of women and their contribution towards many socio-economic sectors across caste, creed or religion. There is a saying, 'Old is gold.' I write this on behalf of those who have served the government and given their precious lives to that service and to the society in general, which includes my father who retired from service recently. These retired employees have been overlooked time and again and their pension delayed. Is this how Govt pays back its own employees?

The book Factfulness by Hans Rosling describes our tendency to play the blame game. Here I would not like to do the same and blame the Public Works Department(Roads) which my father served but wish to point to the causes of failure of the Govt. There is gross mismanagement, lethargic staff and overall systemic breakdowns. Sometimes these happen and cannot be stopped by why are they allowed to happen? Nepotism and favoritism are still a major part of the system.

Solutions are not easy but one way of curing this malaise is to find the root causes such as 'deadwood' operating with minimum output. Such employees should be penalized and turned into a productive workforce.

In this age of Big Data and advanced computing it is time that Govt uses technology to streamline its functioning thereby setting a benchmark for the coming generation instead of beating its chest to save the community from vanishing.

Yours etc,
Christopher Gatphoh,
Shillong-10

Govt high-handedness

Editor,

The arrests of rights activists across the country is a grim reminder of the dark days of emergency. The present government is leading our country on the wrong path and hounding those fighting for the rights of the marginalised, with the intent of crushing dissent. The Government is diverting the attention of the citizens from core issues in our country such as population, water crisis, unemployment, garbage and sewage management etc. Now whether the arrests will stand legal scrutiny remains to be seen. It has been seen that most such cases fall a apart in court due to lack of evidence but after costing a huge amount of precious public resources.

Yours etc.,
MF Kasmi,
Via email

In gratitude

Editor ,

Though your newspaper I would like to thank the two Rotary Clubs based in Shillong for making the effort to continue with the Marathon at Sohra. This will help in putting the State of Meghalaya on the marathon map of the country and the world and thereby give due recognition to the potential of the state runners. It was a well organised run and the participants enjoyed it thoroughly. I hope they come up again with a similar event soon. Best wishes the members of the two clubs.

Yours etc,
Albert Lyngdoh,
Via email